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## The Creation of Power: Leaving the Closed Space of Voluntary Servitude

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The Creation of Power: Leaving the Closed Space of Voluntary Servitude  
*A Manifesto*

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature and The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
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## The Story of an Intellectual Transformation

“Anger, I called it. But it was anger that had gone underground and mixed itself with all kinds of other emotions. To judge from its odd effects, it was anger disguised and complex, not anger simple and open.” (Woolf, *A Room*, 32)

When I was first introduced to the concept of feminism in early high school, the boys in the classroom snickered. One announced he had heard that feminists were angry, man-hating lesbians. Another proclaimed that his father told him feminists, like immigrants, were coming to take the jobs away from men. If there had been a different reaction, perhaps I and the other young women in the class would have identified immediately with the supportive definition the teacher had provided, maybe some of the boys too. Instead of adopting the productive message behind the concept, to impress the boys or maybe just to protect ourselves, no one challenged their taunts and everyone laughed as the teacher tried to inform us otherwise.

Despite this negative first exposure, internally I had decided for myself that I could not let this concept slip from my grasp. I had to cling tight and embrace the contagious mentality of the angry feminist to accompany the chorus in my head singing, “That doesn’t sound so bad. We *should* take some of the jobs and power away from men, they are, after all, *the* problem.” In order to not be ostracized, however, it became necessary to adopt the outward display of the unaware young lady going about her business, walking bait for a boyfriend. I began to obsess over my physical appearance. Nothing could give my secret feminism away, so I hid it behind flowery dresses and



layers of makeup. If I looked the part of the complacent, hyper-feminine teenager, perhaps I could learn to take on the role full time.

Try as I might, I could not extricate the initial reaction to the introduction to feminism from my adopted mentality. As a result of this, the fear and anger I had felt all along were forced to compound and compact in my mind, which only served to exacerbate the situation. My fear based hatred of dominance continued to grow as each negative interaction with a man added more fuel to the fire. Spreading like a disease, this animosity began to take the form of almost an obsessive contempt, only paralleled in mania by my daily role play as a proper young lady. I was constantly looking for further reasons to back up my understanding in every interaction, conversation, television show, movie, or book. Anything would serve as kindling.

It was in this state of tenacious fixation, persisting throughout my teenage years, into my college years, that I first attempted to formulate this project. From this heavy-handed, angry feminist approach I sought to understand power and exclusion in the simplistic binary of men vs. women. As my inquest progressed, each text I encountered seemed to vilify men in the same way that I had grown to conceive of them, which only served to support and further this state of misguided disdain. I was trying to locate the exact placement of women in society through the lens of this binary, but this proved to be a very vain and barren path. Along the way, these notions I had adopted as fact were undercut by tributaries of ideas which revealed themselves to be far more complex than I had initially believed.

After the realization that there was more to the story than what was initially internalized in that classroom and my resulting agenda for the better part of a decade, I

began to feel almost queasy when thinking of my attack-mode strategy. While searching for women's place in the world, I had virtually forgotten that men also had a place outside of my attempts to dismiss and disparage them at every chance. A large aspect of this transformation of thought was the introduction of some of the texts that had been recommended or had been serendipitously discovered on the library shelves. Upon reading Michael Messner's piece, *On Patriarchs and Losers: Rethinking Men's Interests*, a title which initially enticed me mainly because I found it humorous, it was almost as if there was a palpable internal shift. Exploring the concept of masculinity as multiple, Messner explains the harmful and pervasive attachments, rather side effects, of masculinity, something I had barely imagined to be possible. From the reading of this text, I realized that not only could all men not be classified by one category of masculinity, but that they also experienced a fear based response, to other men. Through my reductive view of masculinity, I had participated in the very process Messner posits as a harmful aspect of some factions of feminist theory; I had created my own hegemonic mode of thinking.

Similar to Messner's piece, Étienne de la Boétie's treatise, *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*, served as a pivotal text in the growth of this project and my personhood. De la Boétie's concept of "voluntary servitude" clarified the intricate structure of willingly submitting to dominance, by demonstrating the almost therapeutic rewards of subordination. The psychology of submission and fear makes one realize how oppression and liberation are not necessarily choices, but rather are indoctrinated and often inescapable. Further, the scope of impact of psychological conditioning was not limited to women, but included all beings.

Following this transformative moment, a new version of the self and the self's place in the world began to take shape. From this new viewpoint, I began to re-read some of the texts that had previously been instrumental in my demonization of men. Virginie Despentes' book, *King Kong Theory*, was one such text. Where I had formerly garnered her arguments as contentious and unsympathetic, it re-presented itself as being less about anger and more about an array of viewpoints that could not be simplified or flattened, hence the boldness of her language.

It was from this new found place of understanding that this project received its revitalization. Rather than seeking to source out the ways in which power and space have been denied to women explicitly by men, I refocused my line of inquiry to include the ways in which all beings experience, internalize, and react to instances of a division of self.

In my first chapter I will explore the work of scholars such as Messner and de la Boétie in conversation with contemporary intellectuals such as Annie Ernaux and Despentes in an attempt to source out the intricacies of the subordinate/dominant framework. Further, this chapter explores the exclusive spaces that have been formed around masculinity, the methods for the reclamation of these spaces are elucidated in the following chapters.

The second chapter focuses on what I have termed the "moment," akin to W.E.B. Du Bois' "double-consciousness" (9). Through the lens of Du Bois, Virginia Woolf, and Sandra Laugier, among others, I am searching for a deeper understanding of the wide-spread effects of the "moment" and the resulting state of inaction.

The third chapter will address how language, if reoriented in the direction of the “ordinary,” might serve as a rung on the ladder constructed to aid in the emergence from the depths of a split existence. Further, this chapter will introduce the ways in which a manifested fear may serve to further alienate others, and how a greater self-consciousness may help to reverse these adverse effects.

The final chapter aims to collect, sift through, and utilize frameworks from those who came before in a chronological inquiry. Further, these garnered conceptions are analyzed to determine the most fruitful path to follow to creative expression, one of the most productive ways to emerge from the “moment.”



## Cause I'm a Man, Woman:<sup>1</sup> Meditations on Masculinity

To point out that what appears, in history, as being eternal is merely the product of a labour of eternalization performed by interconnected institutions such as the family, the church, the state, the educational system...is to reinsert into history, and therefore to restore to historical action, the relationship between the sexes that the naturalistic and essentialist vision removes from them...Combating these historical forces of dehistoricization must be the most immediate objective of an enterprise of mobilization aimed at putting history in motion again by neutralizing the mechanisms of the neutralization of history. (Bourdieu, viii)

“It is because he does not know how to love that he ultimately impoverishes his own spirit and destroys his own empire.” (de la Boétie, 23)

One of the most prevalent idioms is: “we must learn from history, or it will repeat itself.” As trite as this phrase may have become, it remains a part of our discourse and warnings for we still do not seem to have fully digested or internalized its meaning. However, one aspect we seem to have held on to is one that paradoxically reinstates and reinforces any historical event or phenomenon as “eternal” through the implication of such an event being immutable. Pierre Bourdieu in his book *Masculine Domination*, suggests a shift away from “eternalization,” though we could explore the ways in which this argument would be strengthened and changed if he in fact meant “internalization.” Through the act of making a concept immortal, we are making the connections ever stronger in our own minds. Rather, all of these external forces and “interconnected institutions” are being internalized, the act of which forms a type of “eternal,” unbreakable bond between the self and these concepts. In order to move forward in

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<sup>1</sup> Tame Impala. “Cause I’m A Man.” *Currents*, 2015

history without the ties to the past experiences previously deemed permanent, Bourdieu suggests that we must reattribute historical events with agency, through the act of “neutralizing the mechanisms of the neutralization of history,” thus allowing for a reworking of the ways in which we interpret history in the present. Though it does not entail the ability to rewrite history, necessarily- it re-focuses attention towards the intersection of family, state, race, and class. These longstanding traditions in history, through the descriptive language chosen and implemented, are in fact being consistently reinforced.

### *CONSTRUCTED SPACES*

What is truly at stake with the continuation of the cycle? An aspect of the forces that help retain the status of “tradition” are found in the “socially constructed difference [which] becomes the basis and apparently natural justification of the social vision which founds it, there is thus a relationship of circular causality” (Bourdieu, 11). I interpreted this “circular causality” as the result of associating notions of permanence to historical events or trends. Further, the social constructions that enforce this cyclical phenomenon are just that- culturally formed ideals that serve as a sliding scale for “justification” and other judiciary tasks in society. One such “tradition” that has prevailed throughout history is that of the designation of space unequally distributed to the various members of a society. This designation has been justified by the reinforcement of the “masculine order” as the dominant force,

Inscribed in the things of the world, the masculine order also inscribes itself in bodies through the tacit injunctions that are implied in the routines of the division of labour or of collective or private rituals (consider, for example, the avoidance

behaviors imposed on women by their exclusion from male spaces). (Bourdieu, 24)

Bourdieu is suggesting that this “masculine order” is pervasive, extending into the composition of bodies and, it would follow, of minds. Through the unequal designations of tasks, the “male space” has been reinforced as the privileged and exclusive arena in which some of the larger events of the world play out.

Women were rarely afforded this space or even access to the “male space;” they were allowed instead the domestic and deemed minor roles which would occupy the least amount of this “male space” as possible. Further, women themselves are a space to be occupied, existing within the “male space,” though paradoxically they are also placed on the periphery, in “inferior places... (the edge of the road or embankment, for example)” (Bourdieu, 24). As women have begun to attempt to claim a parcel of the “male space” for themselves, this necessarily means that they are taking this space away from another, since there is only so much literal and figurative space to be occupied. I understand the “male space” to be something along the lines of a figurative atmosphere that can be moved in between and to and from literal spaces. This figurative atmosphere descends on the physical space, permeates into our bodies, is absorbed by us, and then we complete the cycle by embodying and “eternalizing” the space as such. When these declarations of space are figurative, women seek to make their voices heard. When it becomes difficult to describe or talk about the space in a figurative, otherworldly sense, there is necessarily a shift in language to begin instead to describe the ways that it translates into the physical.



In order to understand the physical implications of the unequal distribution of space, Virginie Despentes, a French post wave feminist, highlights the restrictive nature of a space privileged for some and off limits to others. Despentes, finding the figurative space difficult to navigate, describes this space as being exclusionary to women and created from the excess of masculine energy,

...men's bodies in a closed space, and us shut in with them but not the same as them. Never the same as them, with our women's bodies. Never safe, never equal. We belong to the gender of fear, of humiliation. The other gender. Masculinity, that legendary masculine solidarity is formed in these moments and is built on this exclusion of our bodies. A pact based on our inferiority. (Despentes, 32)

The bodies that Despentes speaks of have been infused with the “masculine order” mentioned by Bourdieu and reinforced by the exclusion of said bodies. The “closed space” referenced by Despentes, I would assert, is akin to the “male space” denoted by Bourdieu. This “closed space” is not as compounded as the term might suggest. Rather, it is the space/structure of culture that has dominated for so long. The women are present in this space, but it is not their own. However, where I believe Despentes' argument falls short, is in its deterministic language. By repetitively implementing the word “never,” she is falling prey to the exact “eternalization” previously mentioned by Bourdieu. “We belong” necessitates present and future membership to this “other gender,” for it does not suggest that we may one day not belong to this grouping excluded from the “male space.” Further, the usage of “shut in” suggests an association to imprisonment, but only so much as it is reendowed with meaning as its immutability is suggested.

In a chapter entitled “Orientations Matter” excerpted from her novel *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed, a scholar of the intersection of feminist, critical race, and

queer theories, is discussing the ways in which a space is both shaped by and shaping of those who inhabit it. Along similar lines to Despentes' argument, there is a line of inquiry as to how certain bodies can create a literal and figurative exclusionary space,

If orientations affect what bodies do, then they also affect how spaces take shape around certain bodies. The world takes shape by presuming certain bodies as given. If spaces extend bodies, then we could say that spaces extend the bodies that "tend" to inhabit them. So, for instance, if the action of writing is associated with the masculine body, then it is this body that tends to inhabit the space for writing...Gender becomes naturalized as a property of bodies, objects, and spaces partly through the loop of repetition. (Ahmed, 250)

Orientation, used by Ahmed to mean both the literal facing of a body and the more nuanced notion of the orientation of ones' thinking, is part of the language she employs when describing the ways that space and the body are reciprocally affected. Some spaces privilege specific bodies over others, this attribution of privilege then translates into power, which then loops back around to solidify the notion that they are in fact the ones deserving of the space in the first place. Ahmed here is describing the ways in which "eternalization" can viscerally affect and seep into all aspects of life and how this "eternalization" reinforces the exclusion of some in specific realms. However, as groups that exist outside of the "male space" are increasingly denying their inferiority (but not asserting their superiority, an important distinction that shows that they are not mutually exclusive), they are necessarily reclaiming the space that was previously closed off to them.

*LITERAL SPACES (COULD YOU SCOOCH PLEASE?)*

When the declarations of space are literal, dealing with this contested space requires an entirely new framework and approach. This framework, however, is seemingly subjective, as the “male space” shrinks in size for those who were previously admitted to this space and necessarily see this as an impingement on their freedoms. To those who are attempting to gain admittance to this space, however, it is seen more as a leveling of the playing field. In a corporeal sense, the clearest example I can conceive of to attempt to describe the physical occupation of (excessive) space is the notion of “manspreading.” A bizarre phenomenon that seems to have originated on public transportation (most notably the NYC subways), is defined by Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary as “[t]he act or practice by a man of sitting with the legs spread wide apart (as in a public seating area) in a way that intrudes on the space of others” (“Manspreading,” 2014). This physical representation/display of masculine prowess is what Bourdieu likens to the physical representation of the internal need to validate societal expectations deeply ingrained in the minds of men,

Being a man, in the sense of *vir*, implies an ought-to-be, a *virtus*, which imposes itself in the mode of self-evidence, the taken-for-granted. Like nobility, honour-which is inscribed in the body in the form of a set of seemingly natural dispositions, often visible in a particular way of sitting and standing, a tilt of the head, a bearing, a gait, bound up with a way of thinking and acting...*governs* the man of honour, without the need for any external constraint. (49-50)

Nobility and honor, millennia old concepts attached to the productivity or success of a man, are highlighted by Bourdieu as internalized categories that are comprised of societally conditioned movements, actions, and reactions which constitute physical

displays of these traits. As society evolves, the outward displays of each trait necessarily shift, though the drives and motives essentially remain the same.

George Maclay in his book *The Dominant Man*, explores the sociological and psychological reasoning behind these signals of dominance. He surveys these signals and highlights an “upright bearing” which “signals a high degree of self-confidence” as the most prominent display of dominance; these displays have been inherited from our animal forbearers and only altered slightly (70). Maclay likens the indoctrination of dominance displays to the role of an actor on stage,

The connection between what we think of as an aristocratic bearing and a feeling of dominance appears to be so thoroughly built into the human mind that an actor with a menial’s part to play has only to think himself into the role for a completely humble stance to follow automatically. Nor could any actor in the role of a mighty warrior hope to convince his audience if he failed to lift up his head and straighten his shoulders. (69)

If exhibiting dominance or submission is truly as easy as entering a mindset, it furthers the notion that these signals or displays are just roles that are adopted and embodied by those who need to exhibit control to convince others of their prowess.

Manspreading is a smaller scale, twenty-first century version of colonization; both assert dominance over some who have been conceptualized as subordinate through the guise of the attainment or possession of the most space. I would like to pause here to recognize both the implications and limitations of the term colonization here. The first definition that appears for colonization is “the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area” (“Colonization,” Oxford Dictionaries). The second definition to appear is “the action of appropriating a place or

domain for one's own use" (Oxford Dictionaries). I am highlighting these two definitions because each points to a different connection and understanding of colonialism. There are centuries worth of insidious and lingering inequalities and prejudices caused by colonization, and I do not wish to diminish this fact. I believe this is true for the Oxford Dictionaries as well, hence the order of the definitions. The second definition, however, is more akin to the way that I am implementing the term, though there are limitations to this usage in regard to the effort to allow space for the historically prominent and prevalent form. That being said, I do believe that the second definition is spot on in terms of the ways that space has been appropriated and claimed by dominant groups.

Now let us consider a counteraction to this colonization of space by those who wish to reclaim their part, that of "womanspreading." A man seated on a crowded subway car was occupying almost two full seats. This was not as a result of his size, but directly from both of his legs being splayed open in a dominant exhibition. Having a very long ride ahead of me, I decided to try my luck with squeezing myself into one of the seats partially appropriated by him. Finding success in this endeavor, I decided to go one step further. I began to mirror his behavior, widening my legs but only towards him, careful not to disrupt my neighbor on the other side (paranoia of occupying too much space) in my own declamatory act of attempting to move myself into the "male space."<sup>2</sup> As our legs met, he began to push back against mine with force, attempting to return me to the "eternalized" notion of my proper place in the male space. What he clearly did not

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<sup>2</sup> "In accordance with a logic that is also seen at work in the relation between dominated and dominant within the social space, and which leads each side to apply the same opposition, but *giving opposite values to the terms that it opposes*, Seymour Fisher observes that men tend to be dissatisfied with parts of their bodies that they judge 'too small' whereas women tend to be critical of parts of their bodies that they judge 'too big.'" (Bourdieu, 66)

expect, however, was for me to push back with the same (gentle, but present) force. I saw the look of confusion wash over his face, which was quickly shifted to anger as he noticed the joy I felt at my small victory. He eventually closed his legs, as did I, and we sat next to each other for the rest of the ride, in the complete silence that the entire event was ensconced in.

While I would definitely not have attempted such a “bold” maneuver on an empty train car (for obvious spatial reasons, but also for the lack of protection or safety felt as a result of the masses of people surrounding us), I felt invigorated by the space that I was able to temporarily inhabit in the most mundane of places and activities. I would not be truthful, however, if I said that there was not the first inkling of fear in my heart as he began to push back initially. Feeling safety in numbers, I was able to move past this. This slight reclamation of space for me was in fact foremost for him an intense transposition as he felt (potentially for the first time) that he was not the omnipotent being deserving of all of the space he desired. This shift in consciousness and spatial awareness was felt as an encroachment on his rights as a man and his claims to the space.

### *MASCULINITY AS MULTIPLE*

When a threat is posed to the outward display of virility correlating to the internal “point of honor/collective fantasies of fecundating potency”- the source of all of men’s “power”<sup>3</sup>- one of the potential responses would be to react according to the societally

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<sup>3</sup> “Manliness, virility, in its ethical aspect, i.e. as the essence of the *vir*, *virtus*, the point of honor, the principle of the conservation and increase of honor, remains indissociable, tacitly at least, from physical virility, in particular through the attestations of sexual potency...which are expected of a ‘real’ man. Hence the phallus, always metaphorically

allotted methods of defending one's honor. These are tried and true ways (minutely varying age-old techniques) of protecting this all too important notion of power derived from physical prowess and ability. While these actions do not necessarily designate all men as devoid of agency, there is a certain thoughtlessness associated with the blind adoption of hoary traditions of masculine displays.<sup>4</sup> This thoughtlessness, however, is not to say that they are lacking motive; rather, the direct motives are subconscious as they have been buried for safe keeping in the minds of all young boys and remain inhumed through adulthood. Michael Messner, one man who has excavated and scoured these motives and drives, is concerned with this exact issue as it pertains to the rethinking and reworking of gender dynamics and criteria. In his talk-turned-article, *On Patriarchs and Losers: Rethinking Men's Interests*, he delves into the ways in which masculinity and the interests of men have affected and altered men's perceptions of the world at large. He begins by referencing William Goode, a sociologist whose wide ranging work tended to center on social and relational interactions. Messner begins, "More than two decades ago, William Goode (1982) observed that when members of a superordinate group are even partly nudged from their positions of social centrality, they often experience this as a major displacement, and respond defensively" (74). This was perfectly exemplified by my train companion. These initial observations are rather broad, though they do get to the heart of the issue.

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present but very rarely named, concentrates all the collective fantasies of fecundating potency." (Bourdieu, 12)

<sup>4</sup> "However, it has also limited our understanding by implying that men lead pre-determined lives with little free agency. Men were "more like actors on a stage, playing out pre-scripted parts. To be a man was to play out a certain role. 'Masculinity' represented a set of lines and stage directions which males had to learn to perform. (Edley & Wetherell)" (Imms, 153-154)

Those who have been societally proclaimed and accepted as the ideal or the pinnacle of possibility (those who have the most potential of displaying masculine virility through procreation) receive a shock to the system if they are slightly lowered from this ephemeral though seemingly eternal position. Messner continues, “This, Goode concluded, is why men have so often resisted the movement for women’s equality” (74). The superordinate group here is clearly men with women as the subordinate. The women’s movement for equality has had this effect on men for the system that the movement challenges is one that has been reinterred in the dehistoricization and “eternalized” as Bourdieu suggests dominant traditions have been. Thus, as the notion of masculine domination becomes further solidified through language, it becomes more comfortable for men to exist in this state without a desire to change it. And why should it change? It has worked so well in their favor for so long that it seems foolish to alter it.

Clearly, however, the system does need to be changed since it is not really working in anyone’s favor. Messner tells us that the interests of men include the maintenance of the current system as much as the interests of women include the necessity to change it (74). Although some men have worked towards the goal of women’s equality, these efforts have not been fruitful or prevalent.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it has been women who have had to bring these issues to the forefront. But why do men feel so attached to the current system? Yes, it affords them with the social power “necessary” to remain above women and other minorities, but it also corrupts them from a very early

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<sup>5</sup> “Casual observation will bear out the truth of this: overwhelmingly, it has been women who have put gender issues on the social agenda. While a few men throughout history have actively supported feminism (Kimmel & Mosmiller 1992), pro-feminist organizing by men never got much beyond the level of a loosely connected national and international network of men, most of them academics and therapists (Messner 1997).” (Messner, 74)



age. This is where Messner's position is crucial and enlightening. Rather than condemn men for this desire to maintain the social structure, he is seeking to understand the points of origin for the different aspects that combine to create this desire. Messner tells us that

...the first scholarly collections of work on men...grappled with a puzzle: how to take seriously and centrally the feminist critique of men's global power over women, while recognizing both the 'costs of masculinity' that many men pay, as well as the existence of vast inequalities among men- inequalities grounded in social class, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and international relations. (75)

These two issues that concerned the first scholars of men's studies still concern Messner as the divide is a difficult one to bridge or make sense of.<sup>6</sup> These scholars do not want to erase or ignore the grievances put forth by decades of effort from feminist movements, though they also do not want to place the entirety of the blame directly on the shoulders of all men. Rather, they seek to source out the different factors that play into the creation of "masculinities as multiple" (75).

This concept of multiple masculinities was elaborated on in an effort to present masculinity as being multi-faceted, rather than just the one reductive form of masculinity that had been applied to a sweeping swath of men for the sake of an easier argument. This reductionist view of masculinity is inherently and reciprocally harmful to all parties.

Wesley D. Imms in his piece, *Multiple Masculinities and the Schooling of Boys*, evaluates the feminist adoption of masculinity as singular, "By critiquing masculinity as

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<sup>6</sup> Brod, Harry, editor. *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies*. Boston, Allen and Unwin, 1987; Kaufman, Michael, editor. *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power, and Change*. Toronto, Oxford UP, 1987; Kimmel, Michael S., editor. *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity*. Newbury Park, Sage Publications, 1987.; Kimmel, Michael S., and Thomas E. Mosmiller, editors. *Against the Tide: Pro-feminist Men in the United States, a documentary history*. Boston, Beacon Press, 1992.

hegemonic, feminism assumed that men are universally privileged, giving little reason to problematize the construction of masculinity or explore its multi-layered structure. One legacy has been the perpetuation of a monolithic definition of masculinity- an image of a homogenous and privileged entity” (156). By suggesting that all masculinity, and therefore all men, identify strongly and closely with the hegemonic structure, the arguments are in fact just further complicating the discussion for they do not allow for the fullest range of the subjective expressions of the self, in this case each individual’s experience or definition of masculinity. Further, this suggestion can have damaging results in its implications. This discussion was taken up by R.W. Connell in his piece, *Understanding Men: Gender Sociology and the New International Research on Masculinities*,

Much of the discussion of masculinity smuggles in a kind of gender essentialism. ...how the concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ tends to become a fixed personality.... all the objectionable things men do- rape, assault, environmental degradation, etc.- can be loaded into the bag of ‘hegemonic masculinity.’ And the more extreme this image becomes, the less it has to be owned by the majority of men. (Connell, 21-22)

What Connell is describing here are the ways in which this reductionist approach to masculinity can serve to invalidate real atrocities that take place by merely denoting them as the by-product of this all encompassing notion of masculinity. As the umbrella of hegemonic masculinity expands, the accountability of the men placed under and protected by it becomes less and less “necessary” as their actions can just be written off as a result of this, the “only” masculinity. The real danger here is that the grouping of all men together under this heading not only removes the chance for expression of all forms

of masculinity, but also associates all men with the most detrimental and unforgiveable “side effects” of this essentialist reduction of masculinity.

In order to fully understand masculinity as multiple, several aspects of masculinities require an explanatory definition. For clarity’s sake, I will begin with definitions of hegemonic masculinity, though I want to emphasize the importance of acknowledging the multiplicities of masculinity; just as in womanhood, it is always subjective. Messner defines hegemonic masculinity as “[t]he form of masculinity that, for the moment, codifies the collective project of men’s domination of women- is defined in relation to emphasized femininity, but also in relation to marginalized and subordinated masculinities” (75). I understood hegemonic masculinity to be that which detrimentally defines those men who do not conform to specific ideals of masculinity as subordinate, by other men, as well as perpetually placing women among these subordinates. Further, Connell explains that “[h]egemonic masculinity is hegemonic not just in relation to other masculinities, but in relation to the gender order as a whole. It is an expression of the privilege men collectively have over women. The hierarchy of masculinities is an expression of the unequal shares in that privilege held by different groups of men” (17). This “privilege” that Connell speaks of is akin to the “male space” designated by Bourdieu and the “closed space” of Despentès’ “masculine solidarity;” it is an exclusive area restricted to those men whose masculinities are identified as being at the top of the “hierarchy of masculinities” which effectively keeps out other forms of masculinity, in conjunction with women and other subordinate groups. Both of these “spaces” serve to keep others out as much as they serve to keep some in. Rather, they are adept at recognizing those perceived by some to be at the top of the hierarchy and the space works

reciprocally to maintain their membership by endowing them with and enforcing their sense of selves. Hegemonic masculinity also works to distribute the remaining space unequally amongst the remaining groups; i.e. first to all other men (though this division is unequal in its own way) and only after this has been done, the minute remainder is thoughtfully relegated to women.

Across time and space, the hierarchy of masculinity has necessarily shifted, with the catalyst being the battle to remain on top. It can be denied or ignored, but this ever pervasive and ever changing battle for space and recognition, played out through hegemonic masculinity, has prevailed.<sup>7</sup> Hegemonic masculinity, however, is just one of the multiple masculinities suggested by Messner, the definition of which is intimately linked, linguistically and theoretically, to “emphasized femininity.” I understood “emphasized femininity” then, to be a physical display of the direct result of hegemonic masculinity on women. Despentes speaks to this response to hegemonic masculinity, likening it to a consolatory message to both women and men: “The over branding of femininity is an apology for the loss of the masculine prerogative, a way of reassuring ourselves by reassuring them” (20). As virility and prowess are challenged, the “masculine prerogative” both suffers and is further reinforced. This challenge incites fear, which leads to an increase in dominance displays as the loss of privilege is viewed as a direct result of women’s encroachment on the “male space.” Despentes suggests that, stemming from the guilt attached to leaving the feminine realm, women exaggerate their femininity as a consolation for this lost male space. This form of hyper-femininity is one

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<sup>7</sup> “From the fact that different masculinities exist in different cultures and historical epochs, we can deduce that we see one of the sources of change; and in the hierarchy of masculinities we see one of the motives. Historians have traced changes in masculinity as struggles for hegemony.” (Connell, 19)

that afflicts women who have been societally conditioned to accede to this notion of the ideal masculinity as being one of dominance and suppression. This in turn results in a subconscious but “voluntary servitude” to the feminine ideal- that women exist solely for the propagation of the male lineage through sexual validation and compliance. This “voluntary servitude” is structured to condition women not only to accept, but to anticipate and idealize the embodiment of the role of subordinate in a relationship; this subordinate position entails both a perversion of the feminine ideal and a further reduction of space to the domestic realm.

*IT'S A GAME THEY PLAY// DISCRETIONARY SUBMISSION*

The perversion of the feminine ideal as a result of submission is one that has been explored through literature, its source and meanings sought after. One of the most personal and jarring accounts of this phenomenon comes from Annie Ernaux. The narrator in her novel, *A Frozen Woman*, is taken aback as she observes the dynamic played out between her in laws, as they act out what could be a scene taken directly from a satire of married life: “‘Coffee!’ bellows the lord and master. ‘Coming, coming!’ chirps his bustling spouse. Oh, don’t pay any attention pet, it’s a game they play: he hollers and she jumps, but they adore each other, believe me, you really shouldn’t let it upset you” (144). Despite the reassuring remarks, the narrator is not convinced that what she has just witnessed being played out was not an apocalyptic vision of her future.

Even from her word choices, the narrator’s discomfort and fear are discernable, almost palpable, as she evokes the language of submission and mastery. To her, it is not just a game, though within this structure it may be easier, less painful and disruptive, for

the mother-in-law, the “bustling spouse,” to frame it as a playful scene. It can be inferred that the mother-in-law did not know any other structure or form for a marriage as a result of her belonging to a generation in which the notions of love and adoration were intricately connected to abuses of power and the master/slave dynamic of the “traditional” marriage. These thematic and relational links were once thought to be indisputable, until the language and conceptions surrounding love and marriage were reworked by creatives such as Ernaux.

This concept of “voluntary servitude” that I have been invoking is sprung from the mind of Étienne de la Boétie, a sixteenth century writer, judge, and philosopher who was largely concerned with the motives behind a collective submission on the part of a nation to a tyrant. Further, the tradition of expecting a submissive audience has been intrinsically rooted in the framework of masculinity, therefore deeply embedded in the minds of modern men.

Why would the writings of a sixteenth century French philosopher have any relevance to this discussion or the present moment in history? Would his thoughts not be outdated and ineffective in this discussion? Think back to the beginning of this chapter, to the cliché of history repeating itself. Due to this unfortunate phenomenon, I believe that de la Boétie’s proclamations and guiding principles are more relevant than ever. We are in a different epoch but we remain in the same frame of mind. Where he was dealing with tyrants in the literal sense, we are now dealing with the repercussions of “voluntary servitude” never being fully resolved or worked through.

As much as a tyrant may seem to be in possession of immutable and uncontradictable power, the propagation of his rule is directly correlational with the

amount of faith that the people place in him.<sup>8</sup> De la Boétie in his treatise *The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*, is seeking to root out the potential reasoning or “justifications” for a people remaining in servitude, mostly of their own accord, through filling the sails of the tyrant. For the purposes of my argument, I am viewing and appropriating de la Boétie’s concept of the tyrant to be an exemplification of hegemonic masculinity and, consequently, the society that gives and maintains the power of the tyrant as a parallel for women and others who exist on the periphery. I understood de la Boétie’s main driving question to be,

And now, since all beings, because they feel, suffer misery in subjection and long for liberty; since the very beasts, although made for the service of man, cannot become accustomed to control without protest, what evil chance has so denatured man that he, the only creature really born to be free, lacks the memory of his original condition and the desire to return to it? (11)

Here, the man that de la Boétie is describing is likened to an even lesser being than animals, for he submits to this control without protest, where even an ox will reject the initial attempts to be domesticated and trained.<sup>9</sup>

Where de la Boétie’s argument and Ernaux’s narrative depart from one another is in this awareness of the “original condition” of those beings that are “born to be free.” Ernaux was not born into servitude and it can be drawn from *A Frozen Woman* that her

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<sup>8</sup> “A single tyrant who has no other power than the power they give him; who is able to harm them only to the extent to which they have the willingness to bear with him; who could do them absolutely no injury unless they preferred to put up with him rather than contradict him.” (de la Boétie, 5)

<sup>9</sup> “It is true that in the beginning men submit under constraint and by force; but those who come after them obey without regret and perform willingly what their predecessors had done because they had to.” (de la Boétie, 12)

childhood was characterized by freedom of expression. Therefore, she was brought up with an awareness of her own freedom, which for her constituted a disdain for marriage and those who sought the comfort its confines were supposed to bring. This is what makes her trajectory in life all the more upsetting. As a young woman, her desires and drives for a satisfying, full life are evident as her thoughts clash with those of a peer,

She agrees with me, choosing a career is very important, but all the while she's busy craning her neck and thrusting out her bosom, trying to attract attention. It dawns on me that scholarly and professional achievements come second with her, second to the happiness of being Hilda, a spoiled, pert little thing, and that she would gladly give up that success to make a love match, for example. She's thinking of college as a way to gain time. (111)

Two things are discernable from these thoughts. First, that a career and education are the main priorities for the narrator; they (in her current mind set) could never be demoted for the sake of love or marriage. Secondly, that she views women who would make this sacrifice as petty and lesser than. What is not easily understood, however, is how voluntary submission can come about despite this awareness of the "original condition" of freedom and a strong desire to maintain this freedom throughout life. So then, how could Ernaux shift from descriptions of marriage being "sheer idiocy" and likening it to "a living death" where she "cannot imagine motherhood with or without marriage" (119-120) to, "[s]ometimes I think that with a man at my side, all my actions, no matter how insignificant...will become charged with life, take on a weight that would let me stop floating, get a grip on the world" (124)? This shift happens over the course of four pages and even less time in years. The futility of the effort to achieve excellence (in this case, a fulfilling life without a husband) is summed up by the narrator as she asks herself and the



reader: “What’s the point of soaring in the sublime realm of philosophy, expatiating on the immortality of the soul, only to revel in an ideal straight from *Echo de la Mode* and secretly dream of settling down?” (107).

I turn back to de la Boétie for insight into this conundrum. If we are to see the submissive man as a parallel for all society, and thus for women in this context, why do we not put up more of a fight? De la Boétie offers a potential explanation for this phenomenon,

...his character is such that he instinctively follows tendencies that his training gives him...therefore...all those things to which he is trained and accustomed seem natural to man and that only that is truly native to him which he receives...thus custom becomes the first reason for voluntary servitude. (15)

This training that de la Boétie is speaking of is descriptive of the ways in which, through language and repetition, customs have become “eternalized” habits and what is seen as natural will be adopted consciously or unconsciously. As a result, the state of “voluntary servitude” may become a comfortable one to rest in, as it would be more difficult and taxing to push against what is “truly native.” This is brought into the present moment by Maclay’s theories on dominance and submission. He suggests that this comfort is derived from, dependent on, and fluctuates in response to the stability of a hierarchy. He states,

The more stable the hierarchy, the more secure each individual feels within it and the less distraction there will be from friendly cooperative effort. If every subordinate remained permanently on the alert to oust his superior at the first opportunity, and if every superior had to remain constantly on guard against these surprise attacks, then obviously the community would run the risk of disintegrating altogether. (20)

The dependence of the propagation of a society on the submission and domination of its members is a heavy burden, but it has become normalized and expected as it has been “eternalized” through practice and repetitive language. Even if there are members of the society who do not feel secure in relation to the stable hierarchy, their individual voices have not been sufficient enough to rupture the whole system. Further, de la Boétie does not deny that there may be “a few, better endowed than others” who cannot be satisfied with a life of servitude, though they are largely outnumbered (15). These few I would liken to those men who have been vocal about inequality and injustice, specifically concerning women’s rights mentioned earlier in this chapter, implicated in the writings of Kimmel and Mosmiller from the early 1990’s. However, the efforts of these men fell short because they, much like the “better endowed” few that de la Boétie mentions, were not in communication with each other, thus their efforts were fractured and disseminated ineffectively.<sup>10</sup> I would then argue that one way to rise above and potentially combat this insidious “voluntary servitude” would be to resist and push back against the compartmental notion of society through creative expression, forming collectives and spaces to connect over shared interests of disbanding harmful hierarchies.

I have digressed quite far from my original line of inquiry, so I will reconnect the themes. The tyrant and those who support him represent the physical and emotional tradition of submission to those who are believed to have all of the power, despite this power existing only because those who submit are in fact reendowing him with it. Thus, a cyclical trap is formed in which this power is constantly reinforced by fear or misplaced

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<sup>10</sup> “...men of strong zeal and devotion, who in spite of passing time have preserved their love of freedom, still remain ineffective because, however numerous they may be, they are not known to one another; under the tyrant they have lost freedom of action, of speech, and almost of thought; they are alone in their aspirations.” (de la Boétie, 15)

desire, resulting in a social hierarchy with divisions more complicated than the notions of gender and class; within each category, separate hierarchies are formed. These have endured the test of time (though it has not been much of a test for these notions) into present day for they were never properly dealt with from the outset. The results are modern day tyrannical structures that have seeped into and colored all interpersonal relations. What I do not believe de la Boétie accounts for, perhaps simply out of a lack of knowledge or understanding, are the psychological reasons for this lack of desire to rebel, what today would be called Stockholm Syndrome. I again turn to Maclay for insight into the psychological rationale behind this occurrence,

To use the psychological language Freud developed, individuals with strong and independent egos have no need to place themselves under an idealized leader. On the other hand, individuals who have little self-confidence or who have for some special reason lost faith in their ability to run their own lives are more strongly driven to fall into a childlike state of dependence and are eager to exchange self-control for control by an outside authority...They fall into a state of mind which makes them yearn for a powerful ally to whom they can hand over all their responsibilities. (27)

While this is not an exact definition for Stockholm Syndrome, it is exemplary of what follows the initial submission, even if it is a forced one. The power placed in the hands of a dominant being is directly derived from a correlation between fear and desire. The fear of not being in control of one's life, or not having faith in one's ability to control one's life, leads to a desire for control from an outside party. Thus, the dominant becomes not only a welcomed presence, but one that is coveted. Rather than being the product of a lazy mind, this is a result of having been conditioned to view one (though there can be multiple manifestations of this one) as the embodiment of all that is necessary (though

not necessarily good) and of power; in the case of de la Boétie the embodiment of power and necessity becomes the tyrannical ruler.

In present day this necessity can be embodied by a wide array of figures of authority, for example a wife who believes she cannot live without her husband and lives for him, much like Ernaux's mother-in-law and her decrees of this aspect of their relationship being merely a game. This conditioning, if repetitive enough, becomes fully ingrained in the subconscious of the subject and is only reinforced over time. Therefore, our responses and (re)actions are, in a way, not really our own as we see how the patterns have (re)formed since de la Boétie's time. In pondering what could possibly be attained from this parasitic relationship, de la Boétie describes a set of values and actions that eerily mirror what follows the "moment,"

To be occupied night and day in planning to please one person, and yet to fear him more than anyone else in the world; to be always on watch, ears open, wondering whence the blow will come; to search out conspiracy, to be on guard against snares, to scan the faces of companions for signs of treachery, to smile at everybody and be mortally afraid of all, to be sure of nobody, either as an open enemy or as a reliable friend; showing always a gay countenance despite an apprehensive heart, unable to be joyous yet not daring to be sad! (25)

It is a conditioned, collective mentality that knows no bounds. It infiltrates every aspect of life, keeping its victims constantly on the edge without room for even a semblance of the fullest expression of the self. The victims I am naming are not one specific group of people, rather they represent all beings in their various realms of submission.

*DISTORTED INDULGENCES*

Men have been prey to other men and insidious ideals, marginalized people have been prey to everyone else, which really only further ostracizes other groups and reinforces traditions of oppression. This in turn lends itself to my conception of the reciprocity in that to strive for excellence in obedience, the notions of both excellence and the necessity of submission are further “eternalized.” In returning to a more explicitly gendered conception of this submission, Bourdieu notes that

What is called ‘femininity’ is often nothing other than a form of indulgence towards real or supposed male expectations, particularly as regards the aggrandizement of the ego. As a consequence, dependence on others (and not only men) tends to become constitutive of their being. (66)

The femininity that Bourdieu is referencing is akin to the servitude of de la Boétie in that both are a performance of expected submission. It also is personified in “emphasized femininity;” a distortion or hyperbolic representation of physical traits. Desportes suggests this emphasis on the expression of femininity comes as a result of “the idea that our independence is harmful;” to make up for this harm, an exaggeration of the ideal is adopted (20). Further, both notions of this expected submission or servitude in fact just serve to reinforce the perceived necessity of this act, as the submissive internalizes them until they become not only “indulgent” of the tyrants but also convinced that this is the only way to survive. The freedom lost that de la Boétie speaks of, “of action, of speech, and almost of thought,” becomes almost unknowable as the instinct to resist becomes less urgent with each repetition of submissive acts (15). The submission of individuals can be attributed to several sources, though these do not necessarily attach a notion of blame or morality to the phenomenon. Further, those who demand submission can be seen to do so

as a result of societal and hereditary conditioning, which again does not necessitate an association to blame. Those who taught them these ways, those who will grow to teach others, and society as a system in general are the perpetrators of these acts-it is a collective effort.

Reworking the understanding of, rather than continuing to “eternalize” the necessity to blame another individual or group, as well as to view those deemed subordinate as a necessary constituent to a productive society, is central to equality movements that exist and are to come. As much as a movement may wish to elect a scapegoat for all of the issues they wish to right, this is not completely just for the behavior is learned from somewhere. I believe that no human is born malicious with hatred in their heart

...but merely because I am of the opinion that one should pity those who, at birth, arrive with the yoke upon their necks. We should exonerate and forgive them, since they have not seen even the shadow of liberty, and, being quite unaware of it, cannot perceive the evil endured through their own slavery. (de la Boétie, 14)

This could be applied to those traditionally viewed or denoted as inferior, as well as men born into and conditioned to submit to the suffering under the yoke of masculinity. If these men never attempt to know themselves in the fullest, in the sense that they were denied the opportunity to explore the multiplicities of the self, succumbing to the pressures of an idealized masculinity can not be a task they are blamed for. It follows that as a result of this denial of opportunity these men have adopted the accompanying prejudices and notions that result in the oppression of others and the creation of a complex hierarchy. While they cannot be blamed per se, they can be held accountable. So long as there is an active consciousness or awareness surrounding these disruptive

qualities and a desire to enact change, this accountability has worked or may not be necessary. This greater self-consciousness, introspective search, and awareness are all qualities that can be more easily attained if there is a reformation of the language used to describe the conceptions of complex systems within society. If this refocusing and reformation is attempted on a large scale, the volume of creative output would increase in tandem. This output would then reciprocally encourage a deeper introspective search as well as provide some aspects of the necessary framework for working through the moment.

One is not born with prejudices or preconceived notions of right and wrong, though the situation one is born into will have a profound effect upon one's conceptions of these things. Rather, as life progresses, things that are observed and learned at an early age become solidified in our consciousness as they are societally reinforced as proper. As de la Boétie so eloquently explained,

As to whether reason is born with us or not...I think I do not err in stating that there is in our souls some native seed of reason, which, if nourished by good counsel and training, flowers into virtue, but which, on the other hand, if unable to resist the vices surrounding it, is stifled and blighted. (10)

Presumably, all humans should be born on a playing field that is relatively equal, all endowed with this "native seed of reason." From readings of Rousseau, we want to believe that we are born possessing everything needed to grow mentally into a reasonable, thoughtful, kind, caring person.<sup>11</sup> However, potential equality will always be interrupted by different factors such as race, class, and geography. This equality is further

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<sup>11</sup> Rousseau, Jean Jacques. *Discourse on Inequality*. 1754.

disrupted by the conditions one is born into and to whom. If the mind and soul are allowed to explore the complexities and multiplicities of the self and one's place in the world, this "seed of reason" will be allowed to flourish, resulting in what de la Boétie recognized as virtue. The converse of this is the immediate restriction of the self upon entering this world, though I would describe this other possibility in different words than de la Boétie. What he denotes as "vices," I would say are more akin to intangible influences from one's immediate surroundings, most notably family members and peers. Further, I do not think it is a matter of resisting or succumbing, for these "vices" are not known to be such when they are first learned and it is not such an active decision. Rather, we voluntarily submit to our environments and those who comprise it. This submission is accepted as a result of necessity, vulnerability, and fear, among others, and results in the subdued and stained "virtue" or sense of self.

Let's talk about fear for a moment. Not the fear you experience from a horror film or a haunted house, nor is it the fear you may experience when exposed to a phobia. Rather, it is a fear that bubbles up from deep inside. The source of this fear, while potentially unknowable, is as profound as any concepts which intentionally aim to induce fear. Experienced throughout your whole being, it is not simply a corporeal fear nor is it restricted to the mind, it is a conglomerate fear. It consumes and engulfs the entirety of your person and demands attention. This could be a fear of failure, of inadequacy, of true emotions or feelings, of disappointment or disappointing, or a fear of mundanity. When any of these fears are coupled with another or exist in multiples, their impact is consequentially increased and deepened. As the effect intensifies, this fear begins to move further and further out of reach. The more fear is allowed to manifest and root itself



in one's psyche, the more difficult it will be to extricate or work towards diminishing the hold and impact of fear when it is finally addressed.

This fear is what simultaneously allows for and forces us to voluntarily submit, we are afraid of what we would be without the one whom we have come to rely upon. We are afraid of how they might react if we attempt to sever our ties with them. We are afraid to find out what might come next. This fear, this pain, can be useful and productive, as contradictory as it may seem. The moment that one realizes they do not exist as they once believed or perceived themselves to, that perhaps this self is not the finest or fullest self, is an extraordinarily rich source of material for creative construction. Before we can figure out how this material can be mined from the mind, we must first understand what the "moment" is, and what it entails.

### **The Wider Circumference of the Moment: The Cleavage of Consciousness**

But this moment is also composed of a sense that the legs of the chair are sinking through the centre of the earth, passing through the rich garden earth; they sink, weighted down. Then the sky loses its colour perceptibly and a star here and there makes a point of light. Then changes, unseen in the day, coming in succession seem to make an order evident. One becomes aware that we are spectators and also passive participants in a pageant. And as nothing can interfere with the order, we have nothing to do but accept, and watch. Now little sparks, which are not steady, but fitful as if somebody were doubtful, come across the field. Is it time to light the lamp, the farmers' wives are saying: can I see a little longer? The lamp sinks down; then it burns up. All doubt is over. Yes the time has come in all cottages, in all farms, to light the lamps. Thus then the moment is laced about with these weavings to and fro, these inevitable downsinkings, flights, lamp lightings. (Woolf, *The Moment*)

Fear invokes passivity; passivity encourages domination. This “pageant” that claims all beings as participants necessitates a submission that renders one a spectator rather than an active contributor. This may parade as a subjective submission, though in truth it spans to include all of humanity. The instance that recognition of belonging to something larger than the self occurs, the notion of a greater reach of impact becomes available. Virginia Woolf called this range of shock the “wider circumference of the moment.” The “moment,” the central component of this second chapter, while experienced in a subjective manner, must be interpreted to have a larger scope of influence than one being. Keeping in mind the notion of harmful variations and side effects of hegemonic masculinity, it becomes clear that this “moment” does not discriminate by gender. The “wider circumference” encompasses all beings, as each will

experience a subjective form of the “moment,” though it is necessary to be conscious of this broad scope of impact.

So, then, what is the “moment?” It is a precise instant. Though it could be studied and charted, mapped like cravings or desires, like a network of nerves and blood vessels, it is invisible and intangible until it has occurred and taken effect. In this virtually unrecognizable and unpredictable occurrence, a permanent shift takes place in which the self is divided into the pre and post moment self. Though there may be a delay of recognition, it will surface as the former conception of the self is slowly severed from the new self, constructed from perceptions of the self by the world. It forces awareness to shift drastically and permanently from how the self and the self’s place were perceived (by the self) to the self that the world perceives. This “moment,” owing to the “wider circumference” of impact than just the self, will be experienced by every person in some form.

It seems strange that something so powerful could happen when you are not paying attention or aware of it, that an entire existence essentially can be shifted without any real conscious effort made. Although the exact cause for this shift is, for the time being, unknowable, this “moment” may be caused by the presence of another being. Whether physically or mentally present, the existence of another is enough to trigger the chain reaction that results in this complete shift in metaphysical makeup. As W.E.B. Du Bois stated, “[t]hen it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil” (Du Bois, 8). Du Bois describes an experience from his childhood in

which he realized for the first time, in a precise moment, that his self was perceived by society as set apart from the majority (or dominant group).

### *A PERMANENT CORRUPTION*

Before the precise flash in which this shift occurs, the conception of the self is seemingly concrete, as the alternate view of the self has not yet surfaced. A peaceful unknown limbo in which we exist as what we see rather than what we are, according to the external world. Being no exception to this phenomenon, Du Bois perceived his being and place in the world only as his subjective conception. However, this “moment” on the playground, quoted above, causes a shift in which his perception of self will be eternally viewed through a different lens. This moment acts as the catalyst for the exploding severance of self, resulting in a chain reaction that splits apart the two versions of the self; the unaware, untroubled self that existed before and the awakened, alienated self that only comes into existence after this phenomenon occurs. Because of this “moment,” Du Bois began to view himself in a split state of existence, or “double-consciousness” as he coined it. “Double-consciousness” is implemented to describe the discrepancies in a person’s existence, torn between two worlds. Du Bois explains “double-consciousness” as such,

...A world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (Du Bois, 9)

The real gravity of this moment can be examined and determined by the split screen vision of the self which is produced by the imposition of external thoughts and opinions on the self. It could be visualized as a television screen split down the middle, like a multi-player video game, the left side of the screen representing the pure self and the right side representing the self as perceived by others. The pure self is one I would describe as the most authentic version of the self, one that has yet to be tainted by the external; the closest an individual may come to the sublime. However, the pure self is in fact tainted by design, for it is masked by the “false self.” This self, as designated by D.W. Winnicott and quoted by Melissa Orlie, is: “What is most readily available...the false self feels neither fully alive nor creative or real” (Orlie, 125). The viewer is constantly forced to shift their gaze from one side to the other, attempting to marry the two in a subjective consciousness. However, rather than being successful in this endeavor, the right side of the screen begins to slowly creep over to the left, causing the colors and images produced by the external world to bleed into the pure self, permanently corrupting the view. Imagining this in another way with the external view acting as a filter for the pure version of the self, this filter does not do much in the way of filtering things out, but serves more to distort true ascertainments of the self and the surrounding world. Anything felt or experienced before this “moment,” any ideas had of the self or others, will be permanently tainted by this infiltration of the external world’s consciousness of one’s own.

In a sense, these two versions of the self may be layered one upon the other. This may happen recurrently, as the “moment” is repeated in various contexts. As a result of this layering, the self may begin to exhibit a palimpsestic nature in which the self has

been written and rewritten until the original copy is barely visible, if at all. Further, one of these repetitions of the “moment” may be one that is self invoked; for example, in the first chapter the notion of masculinity as multiple was explored. From this was distilled a concept that hegemonic masculinity, the pervasive and harmful form of masculinity, is necessarily pushed back against in order to delve deeper into the first copy of the self. The hegemonic structure is one that is nurtured by society, which makes removing the self from this configuration more difficult, as it is validated and encouraged through various social practices.

Splitting the self or having the self divided may not be an existence that is obviously conducive to creative output. However, some of the most intriguing and insightful interrogations of the self have emerged from this very “moment;” the very sensation of being divided between two existences, of recognizing the ordinary nature of the experience in order to turn it on its head, utilizing this division to give oneself a voice. In a way, this has been the experience of the process of constructing this project. I have implemented my split state of existence to frame the evolution of my thoughts during the writing process. This evolution was not a single event, however, but rather a continuous process in which each new awakening provided a new layer to my thoughts, line of inquiry, and argument. Much like the self, this work has become palimpsestic as a result of the persistent revisions and reconceptualization. In many cases, such as my own and those of the works explored in this project, double-consciousness, as painful as it may be to exist in this state, has allowed for the production of groundbreaking and revolutionary reconstructions of the self.

*DIVISIVE AND DESTRUCTIVE DEFINITIONS*

While the division can be felt between the external world's opinion and one's own, this is not the only form of double-consciousness. This double-consciousness can also be experienced through the dichotomy of masculinity and womanhood; what would be described as the all encompassing category of woman in comparison, perhaps conflict, with the essence of what societally affords men power, their masculinity. Here I must explain my word choice; alternatively to the juxtaposition of femininity with masculinity, I propose that what is valued in and for a woman is not simply her femininity, for that does not hold an association to power in the same sense that masculinity does for a man. Rather, it implies a different kind of power, one of manipulation or trickery, framing women as poisonous and deceitful. It is here that the importance of language is first made vehemently necessary and known.

The simple act of choosing a word begins to hold serious weight when light is shed on the drastic differences in phrasing. My words here required and were given serious thought, as all language should, for there could result a completely different intention than originally planned if one does not remain conscious of this notion. Although the stakes are relatively high, they remain tethered to and contained by this project, for the time being. Therefore, the stakes and words here do not compare to those that exist and are utilized daily, respectively, in every corner of the world, for those are necessarily shared with the outside world and resultantly have the potential for a greater scope of impact. Thus, word choice becomes increasingly important if we intend to rise above the previously "eternalized" constraints placed upon individuals by the limited scope of their vocabulary. It is further complicated, however, when in the effort to rework

our own language we come across statements that seem immutable, have been “eternalized” as Bourdieu says, yet contain language that perhaps has not been chosen so wisely or carefully.

I encountered one such example when searching for the proper definitions of the binary terms for categorizing gender expression in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED). Femininity is defined by the OED as, “behavior or qualities regarded as characteristic of a woman; feminine quality or characteristics; womanliness.” This definition places femininity in a subset of qualities under the larger heading of woman where femininity is the visible and ascertainable extent to which a woman represents her sex. It is then deducible that femininity is neither necessary for, nor all encompassing of, the woman. Conversely, though unfortunately not surprisingly, the OED defines masculinity as, “the state or fact of being masculine; the assemblage of qualities regarded as characteristic of men; maleness; manliness.” There are some obvious similarities, such as each consisting of qualities that are essentially representative of the whole (gender) and the conclusion in both being “(wo)manliness.” What is most striking, however, are the first few words of each definition and the discrepancies that arise from their comparison.

The terminology used to describe masculinity are those of whole, complete, uncontradictable existences. It is a simple fact that to be a man is to be masculine. It is an all encompassing category that purports masculine qualities to comprise the entire “state” of being for a man. It has become “eternalized” as we have internalized these rigid definitions. Rather than comparing this metonymic category of masculinity with the feeble quality of femininity, I am implementing what I call womanhood (or the entire classification of “woman”), as the societally proposed ideal which necessarily includes



“emphasized femininity.” Conversely, a man need not fulfill all aspects of what may constitute “manhood;” simply exuding a profound, potentially hegemonic masculinity as it is societally desired is enough. A woman may possess this same vigor and enthusiasm, though in her case it will not be perceived as such; instead it is shifted to represent over-excitement and intrusiveness.

Double-consciousness exists here for a woman may, despite these traits, be reduced to the external perception of herself due to her belonging to the category of woman, enduring and embodying womanhood being the only acceptable goals. In a sense, this double-consciousness may even be a double disqualification. An example of this disqualification can be observed in societal pronouncements and judgments of motherhood as simultaneously admirable and repulsive. The implication of employing one’s femininity may allow for the ascertainment of more power and space, potentially pausing or terminating the sense of self that accompanies an unstructured representation of woman. However, the power and space gained through the utilization of femininity may be looked upon with disdain by misogynistic men who cannot make up their minds, as well as other women who reject this feminine ideal in its entirety. These definitions are relatively arbitrary, though they heavily influence lines of thinking for they become inextricably attached to notions of gender and self. If definitions are to be reformed, what is inherently harmful in the language that is currently employed must be identified first.

One way of ameliorating definitions is to radically change the vocabulary used in discussion of these necessary reformations. Virginie Despentes speaks of another account of double-consciousness along these lines with these essential renovations in mind. She successfully radicalizes her view-point, and that which is gained by the reader, by

implementing rather blunt and sometimes painful language. By paying close attention to the descriptive language she is using and following the path she forged, the reader receives a shock to the system. It is disorienting at first to read descriptions of things that utilize language not typically associated with what is being defined, concepts one is fully acquainted with, though this very shock is evidence enough of the power of word choice.

The two accounts of double-consciousness, those of Du Bois and Despentès, have parallels running through them, but have important and representational differences. DuBois is writing at the precipice of this “moment” where Despentès is writing from the “post-moment” self. For Despentès, the double-consciousness exists between marginalized bodies and the exclusionary space created and promoted by masculinity. Not all masculinity, but the specific variant societally promoted to be the ideal; the notion of the manly man, the man’s man, that ever pervasive and painful companion, hegemonic masculinity. It exists between genders and their expressions, existing currently in opposition, though they could, and I would argue should, be reconciled. This discrepancy stems largely from the expectations of submission, for Despentès, with the conclusion that reliance on another for existence and fulfillment can only be harmful,

My power will never be built on the allegiance of the other half of humanity. One human in two has not been brought into the world in order to obey me, take care of my domestic life, bring up my children, please me, entertain me, reassure me about the power of my intelligence, provide me with rest after battle, worry about feeding me correctly...and thank God for that. (128)

Despentès is suggesting that the masculine reliance on the category of woman has created this exclusionary space through the propagation of the notion of the creation of woman *for* man. From this account, it can be distilled that double-consciousness arises as a result,

in part, of the categorization of women as inferior, subordinate, submissive, and useful from birth. This precipitates and ensures dependence on, if one is brought up to believe they were born for, another. As a result of this dependence, the production of creative output and a reconceptualization of the self are either never presented or imagined, or the effort to do so becomes lost as the drive to do so is paralyzed. This paralysis, experienced by all though only felt by some, leads to a state of inaction; a limbo caused by the inability to process and utilize the moment. This state of limbo is created once the precise “moment” takes place and a double-consciousness is enacted, however unintentional or undesired an action it is, as a result of the submission voluntarily embraced as depicted by de la Boétie and substantiated by Maclay’s theories of psychological reasons for this adoption of a subordinate position.

Prior to this “moment,” it is a limbo for perhaps there is a desire to escape the phenomenon, but too much may feel vulnerable or at stake for action to be taken to correct or rectify this wrong, this imbalance. Further, the paralyzing fear that surrounds a voluntary submission is difficult to overcome, which would result in a more difficult process of freeing oneself from this limbo. What may be at stake is a very subjective issue, though I would assert that the essence is not fulfilling the duties of womanhood by disrupting the norm. One of the most productive ways to surface from this limbo is through action, most notably the creation of theory or other writings that explore this phenomenon from the most personal place, the first hand experience of having lived through it.

*PRODUCTIVE METAMORPHOSES*

The effort to counteract the state of inaction is one that allows for the exploration of the causes and effects of this limbo. Some of the most profound accounts and inquiries have been delivered through writing from this “post-moment” split-state of being. Annie Ernaux provides a very thorough and powerful examination of this state of being as she tracks her extraordinarily gradual and almost imperceptible transition from a relatively carefree young woman looking to explore her sexuality and desire, to a mother of two, wife, and prisoner in the seemingly endless cycle of domestic tasks. For Ernaux, this change occurs in several stages, with many factors and experiences leading to the eventual division of the self. The first moment of awakening passes unnoticed for the narrator until much later in life,

But when I look back from womanhood to girlhood, I know that I was spared at least one shadow over my youth, the idea that little girls are gentle and weak, inferior to boys, and that they have different roles to play... No question of masculinity or femininity, words I would learn later on- just the words, without really understanding what they mean, even if I have been persuaded that what you’ve got in your pants makes a big difference, what a laugh, but no, seriously, did I ever pay for it, raised in that outlandish fashion, without respect for conventional roles. (Ernaux, 33)

These revelations are “post-moment,” but they explore a very interesting notion of the “pre-moment” existence of the woman. Ernaux is reflecting on the notions of her father assuming the domestic role and the mother that of the proprietor and manager, a complete reversal of the roles and relationships surrounding this atypical family. It is important to note, however, that the structure of her parents’ relationship was not intentionally

rebellious, but simply a product of their professions and personalities. Their relationship and their roles within were absorbed as abnormal almost exclusively through language used by others to describe them.

The ordinary has been reordered and any occurrence of this phenomenon will lead to unrest for one is not conditioned to hear variations on what has always been purported to be the original and only copy. Prior to this language being invoked, Ernaux does not find fault with her home life. Here she is seemingly torn from the peaceful existence she enjoyed while she still did not possess the knowledge that would creep into her psyche, gripping tightly and constricting her thoughts, desires, and former beliefs, until they began to conform to the preferences of society. Ultimately, however, Ernaux decides that this has severely hampered her ability to process and organize her life in womanhood for she is not used to what “should” be performed, only what was observed through her abnormal parents and the disdain she felt for other girls’ mothers who embodied the ideal.

Although this revelation comes much later in life, it is precipitated by a series of smaller realizations and comprehensions (or lack thereof) which, combined, are enough to almost completely transform Ernaux’s desires and life plans. The first stage of this transition, the first cleavage of the cliff of the “moment,” crumbles with the highly anticipated flight from childhood to womanhood, propelled by puberty. What Ernaux calls the “last metamorphosis,” her period, is a miracle that “just happens, and like all the things that are supposed to happen in my body, I never imagine any afterward. One day I’ll be a girl with my period, I’ll strut about in a halo of red glory, I’ll go to sleep with my new self, and life will be close to reaching perfection” (48). This “new self” seems to be

the first instance of double-consciousness, though with lower stakes and expectations than the eventual, final cleavage that will almost permanently sever all ties with the vision the narrator possessed of herself and her future life during girlhood. This “metamorphosis” as Ernaux puts it, does not end up being her last, rather it serves as a catalyst for further transformations, each of which contribute, slowly but surely, to the crystallization of her ideals and beliefs into a frozen mass that encompasses her and her body.

What still remains absent in the constitution of womanhood for Ernaux, even with the acquisition of this mutation, is the all inclusive existence and understanding that was anticipated to follow this “last metamorphosis.” Instead, it simply allows for the next stage of transformation to womanhood, the necessary step of understanding, absorbing the examples of, epitomizing, and embodying desire. From the first instance of attempting to attract the attentions of the “sweet altar boy with the pasty complexion,” Ernaux begins to recognize the distinction between her conceptions of desire and attraction, and those that seem to truly attain that which she yearns for, though it is not made clear until much later in life,

I don't yet understand that simply being there is not enough to attract attention, you have to turn on some charm, be a bit flirty- and how dumb can you get, throwing yourself at the boys like that, they want to be the ones making the moves, etc. (Ernaux, 50)

It is incomprehensible to her narrator that her existence is not sufficient for the task of exuding desire prior to this moment. It seems to her as though simply holding a physical presence is going to be enough to establish a metaphysical presence in the desire section of this boy's brain. Sunday after Sunday, however, this object of her desire fails to

reciprocate the association. Perhaps if she had been “nourished by good counsel and training” her virtue would have been able to flourish, thus helping her avoid these false-steps (De la Boétie, 10). These little snippets of information gathered about what she deems to be the proper composition of women are compiled into a concept of what she garners to be the proper existence of women. This collection of information stored in her mind slowly grows, causing the slightest shifts in being as each concept is elaborated upon. These slight result in the “moment,” in the wake of which she feels paralyzed, and resultantly succumbs to the voluntary submission of marriage and motherhood.

### *LINGUISTIC CONDITIONING*

Just as Ernaux slowly collected a set of ideals that she believed to constitute the proper existence of a woman, from a set selection of societally proposed ideals, so has society been conditioned to believe in this same structure. This has been accomplished in part through the repetitive use of specified language that is implemented and has been “eternalized” to describe women.

As a result of this, the willingness to submit one’s personhood in order to achieve these unattainable ideals of excellence is increased. If it is to be understood that the composition of a woman is societally predetermined and categorized according to degrees of femininity, then it is deducible that the rejection of these ideals would be the most productive counter-attack; that ignoring and doing away with femininity is the most feminist, fruitful, rebellious act the modern woman can undertake. Maclay provides insight into how the subordinate has been wrongly categorized as rebellious,

We often imagine the typical subordinate as a rebellious or rancorous individual kept in his place by force- a potentially assertive character who longs to be

dominant, or at least independent, but who cannot withstand the powers ranged against him. In fact, this somewhat mythical picture of the subordinate personality is far removed from the everyday reality. Historical evidence and clinical studies agree that the subordinate in a hierarchical structure often accepts his position willingly. Far from challenging his superior's rank, the submissive personality admires and looks up to his dominator.... In man, as in other hierarchical species, this remarkable willingness to defer to rank order superiors is a predictable result of millions of years spent in a dominance order context. (18)

If the subordinate is not a force to be tamed, but a voluntary submissive, the ideals, and ways of combatting them, previously identified, become further complicated. Thus, it may seem to be productive to adopt this role of the "rebellious or rancorous individual" in order to invert this structure, once the submission is recognized through the "moment."

However, this specific role of rebel is an extremely exclusive notion for it does not allow for the choice of expression, one of the pillars of Sandra Laugier's thesis in her piece, *The Ethics of Care as a Politics of the Ordinary*. What is most at stake for Laugier is "the inclusion and empowerment of women's voices and expressiveness (and that means ALL women), and attention to their experience" (217). Further, she intends to utilize Ordinary Language Philosophy (OLP) to "show that attention to expression is care about human expression as embodied in women's voices" (217). OLP is defined by Laugier as "[t]he uses and practices of language" (217). If OLP refocuses the attention to expressiveness, then applying this to feminist philosophical theories as well as implementing it in daily speech will bring attention to all voices previously denied a platform.



By rebelling against the “ideal,” these women are, in actuality, prolonging the notion that there *is* an ideal. Their language, originally intended to radicalize the conception of “ideal” is just reinforcing and “eternalizing” the dualism that surrounds the nature/culture discussion and by proxy that of women/men and societally proposed ideals for all four (corresponding) categories. Rather than promote one vein of womanhood as idyllic, even just as a societal notion, a more productive course of action would be to promote an all encompassing notion of woman. Just of woman, that is it; no tangents or footnotes or disclaimers. A woman is what each individual, subjective woman defines it as, just as masculinity is subjectively charted. Despentes speaks of this notion in terms of not looking upon those who adopt one form or another of womanhood (perhaps in opposition with one’s own) with disdain,

We may feel astonished, at first, that these girls so enthusiastically adopt the attributes of woman-as-object, that members of this young generation mutilate and flaunt their bodies while buying into the notion of the ‘respectable woman,’ which is to say, distant from sex as lust. But in fact there is no contradiction. Women are sending men a reassuring message, ‘Don’t be afraid of us.’  
(Despentes, 19)

This recalls the discussion of emphasized femininity as “these girls” Despentes is referencing are the embodiment of this perversion of gender expression. Further, she is attributing this display of femininity to a need to make up for the “masculine prerogative” lost in the act of reclaiming and redistributing space.

As the understanding of the intricacies of the most productive way to educate and include all in the effort to rebalance power are explored, a more in depth look into what this power slated for redistribution truly is becomes necessary. In order to most

effectively embody and exude this notion of power, it is important to first source out when and why this power was denied to women. The first chapter worked through the ways this occurred as a result of hegemonic masculinity and other pervasive and painful “eternalized” notions. There are three necessary steps to follow to attempt to accomplish these lofty goals; the first being one of critical reevaluation, we seek to understand all sides of the story in order to formulate the most inclusive and productive line of inquiry.

Following this notion, it becomes important to paint a picture of modernity’s view of the self, specifically the woman’s self. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP) posits that “[p]revailing conceptions of the self ignore the multiple, sometimes fractious sources of social identity constituted at the intersections of one’s gender, sexual orientation, race, class, age, ethnicity, and so forth.” This view is problematic first and foremost because of its demanding quality of forcing the self to compound its multiplicity into a strange conglomerate of itself, barely resembling what could be the fullest embodiment of the self. This further reinforces the inability to express oneself fully for it narrows the necessary conditions of who is listened to and who is not encouraged to speak at all. Those who may be superior in one way will still be denied the platform if they have a well-rounded and expansive notion of self. Further, this view once again proposes an ideal of the self which will entail a disdain of those who do not fit this mold. This is evocative of the compression of multiple masculinities as well.

This ideal is one that, in its disavowal of the multiplicity of the self, is disapproving of women for it is disapproving of those selves which are traditionally associated with the realm of the body and emotion. It became quite easy to enforce this ideal as women submitted voluntarily, as a result of steady pressure. One of the most

efficient ways to restrict the freedom of those deemed subordinate (women), by those in a place of dominance, was to place women in the realm of uncontrollable emotion and irrationality. Further, “These thinkers (men) advocated confining women to the domestic sphere where their vices could be neutralized, even transformed into virtues, in the role of empathetic, supportive wife, vulnerable sexual partner, and nurturant mother” (SEP).

Maclay theorizes that this garnered information on the most effective way to maintain the subdued nature of a group of people is similar to the subordination of a nation under a government: “[t]he increasingly widespread science of political brainwashing illustrates how easily man’s servile tendency can be exploited once the practical applications of dominance theory have been recognized” (27). Through keen observation, inherent drives to submit can be perverted and manipulated to most productively serve the needs or wants of men.

If this exploitation can be identified by the submissive, it can also be deteriorated slowly through a gradual refusal of submission. When a woman or subordinate/submissive places their self on the stage to exhibit the fullest range of their self/selves, this is the moment that the dominant begin to panic. It is almost an instance of double-consciousness being enacted on these men, for they realize for the first time that they are not the all powerful being that they once assumed themselves to be. This “moment,” different but similar in many ways to the one experienced by subordinates, is one that induces a fear based response of restricting the freedoms of those who have threatened their virility. The reasons for this restriction were explored in the first chapter, though I have by no means reached a conclusive end point.

In keeping with the importance placed on language, it becomes crucial to break down the extent of a passage or phrase, for in many cases it has been removed from the ordinary; thus blurring the perception through flowery descriptions or potentially misrepresentative words. While Desportes believes that the meaning of “emphasized femininity” is only one of reassurance, I would argue that it is in fact more in line with a threatening memorandum than a pacifying message, delivered under the subconscious guise of reassurance. These women who do not allow themselves to be written off, spoken over, or stifled are in fact conveying a message closer to “don’t underestimate us.” It is one that should incite fear in the hearts of those who still subscribe to the notion of woman as inferior. Women are telling men that although they have been first and foremost mothers, wives, and a fraction of the pay grade in their eyes, this will not be “eternalized.”

Suspend your disbelief, only momentarily. Despite the prevalence and pervasiveness of patriarchy through the centuries, we are in a unique moment in time where the complete dissolution and reconstitution of society is possible. Now more than ever, women are not waiting for the platform to be handed to them but rather are building it themselves. What must follow then, is an extension of the acquired space to all bodies and beings, for everyone is struggling in their own subjective way. If we ignore the pain of those who have previously been portrayed to be incapable of such an emotion, we are in fact no better than all oppressors and tyrants who came before. Okay, now the speculation can continue. This is what a utopian, naïve vision of the future would look like, but we know better than to daydream about the impossible. The ordinary must be allowed to come to center stage if the reconstitution of understandings of the self and the

surrounding world is to be accomplished, for the unattainable excellence has been in the spotlight for far too long.

We have to do something, for we have done nothing or too little for far too long. It has become unbearable in its weight and impact. As Virginia Woolf put it so persuasively,

Let us do something then, something to end this horrible moment, this plausible glistening moment that reflects in its smooth sides this intolerable kitchen, this squalor; this woman moaning; and the rattle of the toy on the flags, and the man munching. Let us smash it by breaking a match. There- snap. (Woolf, *The Moment*)

The moment, for Woolf, is one that reflects the pain and undesired qualities of life; the sounds and sights of discontent are echoed throughout this moment of reflection. When the moment is taken at face value, these sounds cannot be heard and the reflections are rendered invisible. When the “moment” and all of its associated trauma are explored, however, much more is brought to light. These sights and sounds and sighs are once again rendered visible as they shift from the realm of the unspoken, unattainable ideals of a silent society of excluded bodies into one of exposure and exploration. This reorientation away from the unattainable, towards the ordinary, through language and reconfigured thought, is one of the most crucial steps in the redistribution of space. The more beings able to access this space, the greater the volume of creative output will be. This will be facilitated through, and in part as a result of, this shift towards the ordinary and a more expansive concept of contentment.

**“Women Speak: Opening Women’s Mouths”<sup>12</sup>**

So that if it was her beauty merely that one thought of, one must remember the quivering thing, the living thing... and work it into the picture; or if one thought of her simply as a woman, one must endow her with some freak of idiosyncrasy- she did not like admiration- or suppose some latent desire to doff her royalty of form as if her beauty bored her and all that men say of beauty, and she wanted only to be like other people, insignificant. He did not know. (Woolf, *The Lighthouse*, 29-30)

Perhaps an ordinary life is not so bad. Maybe an existence on the peripherals of society’s eyes, as far removed from the spotlight as possible, is desirable, if not preferable. It takes much more to recognize the simple truth of the ordinary, though this effort results in a productive reorientation. Maybe one of the fundamental issues with society in the current era is that it is idealized to strive for the extraordinary, reducing all others to minor roles in the show. In this “moment” the subjectivity of those who do not fall into the extremely narrow criteria of this excellence is essentially forgotten by the cream of the crop. These plain people become extras in the background of the film the elite star in.

This reduction and dissolution of the relevance of another’s life is what Sandra Laugier identifies as one of the primary contributors to the oppression of women and minorities. This largely encompassing category of the oppressed is what Laugier refers to as the ordinary, which she defines as “[w]hat we are unable to see, though it is right

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<sup>12</sup> "Episode." Written by Phoebe Waller Bridge, directed by Harry Bradbeer and Tim Kirkby. *Fleabag*, written by Phoebe Waller Bridge, season 1, episode 1, Amazon, 2016.

before our eyes” (226). Further, the ordinary “...are undervalued precisely because they are assigned to activities that have been socially and morally devalorized, *denied* because we (men and women) do not *want to see*, or acknowledge, what we depend on” (226, emphasis in original). The ordinary people are the main concern of the ethics proposed in this piece, a continuation of the theories of Stanley Cavell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and J. L. Austin. The theories presented by these three thinkers are predominantly concerned with OLP. What Laugier is seeking to map out utilizing these theories is how ordinary language and ordinary philosophy, combined with a heightened awareness of both how we care and use language, can rework the conceptions of “ethical and political issues...civil disobedience and radical democracy...care and gender equality” (217). The ordinary comprises the “denied, undervalued, or neglected” which links it seemingly inextricably to women. This is due to the fact that most of the occupations that fall under the category of ordinary have been held by women and people of color, until very recently. This shift has led to a perceived loss of prestige attributed to a profession. This loss of esteem only comes about, however, when more than half of the profession is comprised of women. Laugier goes on to suggest that the disavowal of the ordinary “has to do with contempt for ordinary life inasmuch as it is domestic and female, and it stems from a gendered hierarchy of the objects of intellectual research” (217). Thus, Laugier is seeking to bring the ordinary to light and give a voice to all humans.

### *ORDINARY REORIENTATIONS*

To successfully bring this ordinary to the forefront, a reevaluation is in order. What is meant by various philosophical theories and their resulting language must be

challenged. This questioning, initiated by the application of the principles of OLP, will direct and reorient language towards the ordinary. Philosophy from its inception has been a patriarchal system, observing and theorizing on the actions and thoughts of men. Cavell expresses the irony of the misogyny and disdain for the ordinary and others found in the language of the philosophy of straight men, for philosophy was the fruit of the loins of homosexual male interactions, something that many of the heterosexual male philosophers of the last few centuries must find very troubling to their sensitivities (233). We are again brought back to the notion of the importance of language, which Laugier specifies as “used and spoken by a human voice, filled with human breath” (224). The language implicated and utilized in philosophy as well as every day life is one of specificity and exclusion; it removes the voice from the ordinary and widens the platform for the elite. In rewriting and rethinking the language used in daily life, not just in theories or scribbles, one can attempt to rework the way that society functions in association to language. The expansive proposed achievements of OLP include a system that, for Laugier, could be achieved through simple attention and recognition. She states,

Attention to human voices and to ordinary life creates a paradigm shift in ethics that is deeply connected with attention to, and repossession of, ordinary language. Attention to the experiences of every day life and to human textures and expressions makes sense only when women’s expressions are included, and this is the deepest critical feature of OLP, as well as the starting point of its feminist accomplishment. Knowing what we mean, *meaning what we say*, is the core of OLP. (228, emphasis in original)

It is precisely the language that has been utilized to describe the situation or character of those who have been left off of the roster that stifles and stunts the expansion of



expression to all humans. Laugier is suggesting that giving those who have previously been silenced the proper recognition and respect (even just through expression) can change the way that ordinary people and the ordinary in general are perceived in society.

This also harkens back to the arguments made by Sara Ahmed in her piece *Orientations Matter* as discussed in chapter one, as her argument centers around the phenomenological approach to the relationship of beings and space. As spaces affect and are reciprocally affected by bodies that “tend to inhabit them,” Ahmed makes the connection that writing has been retained as a part of the “male space.” As the associations are repeated that the space of writing is one that should be inhabited by the masculine body, this notion has been solidified (252). However, Ahmed challenges notions of the solidification of spaces as she claims, “and yet, it is not always decided which bodies inhabit which spaces, even when spaces extend the form of some bodies and not others” (252). This suggests that the potential for a future in which these spaces can be inhabited equally by those who wish to be there may exist. In the mean time, Ahmed directs this argument continually towards the goal of creation and creative output. If the spaces are to be inhabited by those to whom the form of the space is not explicitly extended, then the space must necessarily be claimed by some degree of force. She argues,

Women “do things” by claiming spaces that have not historically belonged to them, including the spaces marked out for writing. As Virginia Woolf shows us in *A Room of One's Own*, for women to claim a space to write is a political act. Of course, there are women who write. We know this. Women have taken up spaces orientated toward writing. And yet, the woman writer remains just that: the woman writer, deviating from the somatic norm of “the writer” as such. (252)

Using Woolf as her guide in this line of inquiry, Ahmed makes the case for the active rather than passive nature of writing carried out by women. This is seen as an explicitly political act to both Ahmed and Woolf before her, though it may not be felt as such by those to whom the space has always been extended to. This active nature of the task of being a “woman writer” is one that continually reinforces the binary of writing and writing done by women. She explains and explores this with two poignant questions, “So what happens when the woman writer takes up her pen? What happens when the study is not reproduced as a masculine domain by the collective repetition of such moments of deviation?” (252). What happens, I would argue, is the distribution of space is disrupted as it begins to be reallocated to all those who wish to visit the space rather than just those who have traditionally been welcomed as guests. These conceptions of space and the language used to describe its distribution and occupation in conversations intended to reorient them, are harmful in their reinforcements of the very ideals they are attempting to devalue. These notions are powerful and erosive as they are expressed through speech, but what about when they are just thought? Can these thoughts have as deep of an impact as words do?

### *DO THOUGHTS COUNT?*

How does this theory play out when the language is not spoken, but thought? Is there a similar poison in our perceptions and judgments of the ordinary? Does this poison seep out of our mouths to color the language we choose? I would assert that there is, and it does. To show how this can occur without any forethought or imagined prejudices, I would like to enter into a thought experiment.

You are on a coach bus heading for a weekend away. As soon as you board the bus and find your seat, you tune out the surrounding world with the headphones you made sure to bring. Before the bus can take you onto the highway to carry you off to destinations near and far, it must stop at the local terminal. As the bus pulls in, your window sidles up parallel to one looking into the building. You glance in, momentarily pulled out of the world you have constructed around the two seats you occupy, and your eyes alight on one woman sitting behind a desk, which is itself behind a plexi-glass partition, and you begin to wonder how she came to be there. “What led her to this job, at this terminal, in this town?” you ask yourself. Though you cannot even see her face, you continue this self barrage of inquiry. How does she feel about her situation? Is she happy? Fulfilled? You find yourself pitying her. The internal bombardment continues; how could you pity her? What right do you have to make these judgments? Is it because you went to college and have a degree? Maybe she did too. Because you are willful and hotheaded as a result of your age? She was young once too. Still, you cannot shake the sensation of the way that your body and being reacted to your initial perceptions of her, ultimately leading to further queries about her inner being. Does she not wish for more than this? To move to a remote corner of the earth to start completely fresh, as often as she would like? To do what she is passionate about and what brings her joy?

Now picture this. You are seated near an acquaintance who at this very moment of inner turmoil turns to you and says, “I wonder if Barbara is working today.” This woman whose life you have been speculating the details of for several minutes all at once regains the status of subject as you apply her name and family to her previously conceived solitary being. Your acquaintance knows this woman; you realize you do too.

She is no longer an anonymous entity to project your fears and assumptions upon. She, in that moment, becomes a visceral being with thoughts and feelings; though haven't you always known this? Or had you subconsciously omitted her subjectivity for ease of appropriation? Suddenly, the memories rush back into your conscience, you remember this woman's story. After leading an involved life, Barbara was hit by a car as she was out for a walk and was seriously injured. After recovering from this near death experience, she was finally able to return to work. This is where you find her. From the safety of the bus, with three layers of glass between you and her, you have passed judgment as far removed from her subjectivity as possible. Still, you felt as though you had the vantage point; physically you are above her in the raised coach, but mentally you have also placed yourself above her. Although your perceptions of her are not solely based upon outward appearance, you are judging based upon what you can see, though this is intensified by the internal factors such as fear of mundanity or inadequacy. If this entire episode takes place in your mind, born from your line of sight, are the two systems ever really extricable from one another? Or are our perceptions always colored by our vision and vice versa?

### *THE SEPARATION OF POWERS*

Is it possible to only think of a person in regards to their corporeal self? Can one ever truly forget the "living thing" as it exists, eternally attached to the external shell of beauty or will we always attribute our own perceptions of their subjectivity to this outward appearance? According to the description given by Mr. Bankes quoted at the beginning of this chapter, it is seemingly more difficult to remember the cerebral

component of the woman than the corporeal. But is this only afforded with such ease due to his gender? Could a woman accomplish the same feat when looking at another woman? When regarding a man? Is this not exactly what you have done with the woman at the bus terminal? I pose these questions because I have often noticed myself, strangely enough, thinking along painfully similar lines to Mr. Bankes. When I see a beautiful woman in a magazine, movie, or even passing by on the street, all evidence of her subjectivity vanishes as it is replaced with a disdain for her as an object. In my jealousy and self consciousness, I erect a shield which may momentarily prevent me from feeling any guilt or discomfort at objectifying this woman, and I am able to project my desires and fears upon her entity for she has become devoid of “the quivering thing, the living thing” (Woolf, *The Lighthouse*, 29-30). All that remains is her corporeal shell; in the perceived, momentary absence of her subjectivity I am able to judge freely for there are no longer any real human traces of her. This shell that I have reduced her to is one that separates her womanhood from her beauty, it encloses and protects her subjectivity from my gaze. In these moments, I think and act like men.<sup>13</sup> I forget, for the briefest instance, that all beings have a subjectivity that cannot be erased by another- try as they might, and they have. I place these women below me, though it is only done because I fear they are too far above for me to ever catch up.

Before the discussion can continue, I feel that a disclaimer is required. This behavior, of reducing another being to their objective state, is not one that I cherish or would promote. I despise this behavior in myself as equally as I despise it in others. I will it to stop, I manifest positive thoughts and affirmations. I endeavor to verbalize

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<sup>13</sup> Which men I am not sure, perhaps only heterosexual men with perfect vision and enough self hatred to fuel this subjugation?

compliments when they are truly felt rather than swallowing them in order to not fluff the ego of someone I already view as “too beautiful” to deserve them, whatever that may mean. Despite my best efforts, however, through conditioning by repetitive language and practices, I have fallen prey to the internalization of my environment. The response and adaptation to this environment begins at birth and continues into adulthood, perhaps unrelenting until the “moment” occurs. Prejudices are produced externally before an individual is endowed with them. A reworking and reorientation of the language implemented to describe and conceptualize others and the world at large can aid in the introspective review of the self, an integral part of the process to minimize the effects of conditioned biases.

For women and other subordinated groups, these internal, self-reflective processes are and have always been constant and integral parts of the self. These groups have been conditioned to continuously review their character and interactions in and with the world. But do dominant beings, i.e. men at the top of the hierarchy of masculinity, not have these thoughts? Is there no internal conversation with themselves about the consequences of their thoughts, words, and actions? If not, I would assert this is a direct result of the compounding of masculinities as multiple into a hierarchy resulting in enforced hegemonic masculinity. This, the most painful form of masculinity, contains a disclaimer that it is weak for a man to look inside of himself, for this would signify insecurity, which is equated with failure. Like Mr. Banks, it seems easier for a man to forgo the subjectivity of a beautiful woman in order to ensure her submission and render her more manageable.

If she cannot fight back because all she is endowed with is beauty, then she is an easy target. So what happens when she is more than her beauty? A man becomes increasingly aware of the complexity of her being and consequentially of the threat to his power from this intricate existence. As a result of this fear based response, he accordingly works to diminish her power and autonomy in order to maintain her inferior status. Holding all of the societal power himself, the dominant, usually the man, has generally had the upper hand, making the outcome of these situations relatively predictable. It goes a bit like this: the man desires a woman; he pursues her for her beauty; her desire to paint or write or create or work is stronger than her desire to be subjugated and she rejects him. She has regained the faith in herself to run her own life (Maclay). In a blind rage at this rejection, the man seeks to diminish her worth as much as he can. Therefore, he will slander her in society claiming she is impure and improper. If women are subordinated through a diminishment of their subjectivity, the external objectivity is all that remains. Or, all that she possesses, in the eyes of the dominant, is her beauty. This beauty that he so cherished before this rejection can be reoriented to function as a taunt, that her beauty, her only noteworthy attribute, will fade. Along with her beauty, the bloom of youth will also fade. This functions as an adequate torment for women, though it would not have the same effect on a man for youth is not a necessary component to his virility or prowess. Men could continue to father children until the day they die, regardless of how their body has deteriorated or aged. In order to invalidate her longing for more than just a life with him, all angles must be attacked.

*DISSOLVED SUBJECTIVITES*

Now how does this relate to my conception of women and my actions? In the way that I too am capable of dissolving the subjectivity of another woman for my own gain or self preservation. I am capable, just like a man, of viewing her whole being but seeing nothing other than her objective beauty. I am not afraid of emasculation, but I am terrified of not being enough or as much as other women; I fear this in the physical form as well as in my accomplishments and attitude. I project these fears on another woman and in order to preserve them as subordinate blank slates, I pretend that they do not have emotions of their own. Where I depart from the tract of the fear based responses of men, however, is in my reflection. I am acutely aware of what I am doing and I am unhappy with it. I should not have to (or want to) reduce another woman to anything other than her fullest form, her most complete expression of her self, in order to maintain my own happiness or self worth. I should be boosted and invigorated by the success and power of other women, not dissuaded by my own perceived shortcomings. I should celebrate these accomplishments and praise their efforts, not minimize them by attributing all achievements to their physical beauty.

I always return mentally to an episode of *Fleabag*, a show written by and starring Phoebe Waller-Bridge, in which the main character, Fleabag, and her sister Claire are attending a lecture. We find out that they are only attending because their father, in his everlasting guilt for raising two daughters without a mother, plies them with tickets to feminist lectures. Titled “Women Speak: Opening women’s mouths since 1998,” the lecture opens with a query: “Before we begin, I would like to ask you a question. I don’t know about you but I need some reassurance so I pose the question to the women in this



room today. Please raise your hands if you would trade five years of your life for the so called perfect body.” Without a moments pause, Fleabag and Claire’s hands shoot into the air and the crowd collectively gasps, then holds their breath. The two women slowly lower their hands and sink further and further into their seats. Fleabag then leans over and whispers to Claire, “We’re bad feminists” to which Claire replies, “I want my top back.”<sup>14</sup> Two thoughts immediately pop into my head. First, do they answer this way because they grew up without a mother’s influence? Then immediately, it can’t be (just) that because I did grow up with a mother and I would probably have answered the same way, if I thought I would not be judged for the answer. Does this make me a bad feminist? A bad person? What is worse, judging myself with such scrutiny that I would trade valuable time in this already too short life to be more attractive to society or judging other women for their subjectivities, rather, completely ignoring their subjectivities and only recognizing their objectivities? Is one worse or are they equally as harmful to “the cause?”

Everything I have described in this chapter has been an exemplification of the ways in which all of the complicated, seemingly inextricable factions of society and the self negatively manifest themselves. Further, it is exemplary of what can happen when these issues are not addressed and self-consciousness is not expanded and explored, for these prejudices and notions of superiority, inferiority, mundanity, and a whole host of other venomous notions of the self will simply become further ingrained in the psyche

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<sup>14</sup> "Episode." Written by Phoebe Waller Bridge, directed by Harry Bradbeer and Tim Kirkby. *Fleabag*, written by Phoebe Waller Bridge, season 1, episode 1, Amazon, 2016.

and soul of those who cannot or will not recognize them for long enough to attempt to chip away at their foundations.



## **The Framework of Power: Expanding Creation**

The experience of seeing men in a childlike, fragile, vulnerable light made them seem nicer, less intimidating, more endearing. And in fact accessible...More than I would have thought, it lessened my aggressiveness toward men, which I consider a good thing-contrary to what people seem to expect. I get furious when I am prevented from doing or being something, but that is not because of what men are or do. (King Kong Theory, 68)

Observing interactions and reactions taking place around oneself, one may garner different facets of an existence than would be derived solely from introspection. The growth of awareness can be viewed as an evolution, in the sense that a new self has been extricated from a previous, repressed self and improved upon. As we have evolved and progressed throughout the span of history, so have cultural practices. This is not always a steady, even advancement, as different periods entail different challenges and obstacles, as well as wildly varying viewpoints. However, there has been progress nonetheless. Building upon the foundation of what came immediately before, the growth of awareness, understanding, theory, and production has evolved exponentially.

This evolution has involved both productive changes and shifts as well as further damaging results. It is crucial for the development of new structures to identify the problematic aspects of previous systems in order to create a more inclusive and mindful framework. What I will attempt to elucidate in this final discussion are resolutions and suggestions to build upon those incomplete structures derived from the texts explored in previous chapters. These will be put towards the creation of a more productive framework for understanding and ultimately battling certain pervasive and harmful

historically “eternalized” concepts, in an effort to draw out a potential way to enter closed spaces and produce creative output in the wake of the “moment.” The disadvantageous aspects of former efforts have been aired out and digested and the text has been infused with what has been distilled.

With each new evolution kindled by the conflagrant pain emerging from a split state of being, a different space is examined, its problematic components identified, and access to this space is either created or edged closer to being attained. Further, some of these progressions came about through an evolution of the self; the “moment” (the first instance of double-consciousness) developed the understanding of the self as distinct from what was previously believed to be true. The “moment” also functions as an evolutionary trigger. In the wake of this “moment” there are essentially two categories of people that emerge. The first is composed of those who take this information and do nothing with it; they do not examine the intricacies of their consciousness to elucidate issues and potential solutions. This category resultingly consists of those who could be classified as having submitted voluntarily.

The second category includes those who could not let this moment fester. Instead, they used this very “moment” to propel themselves into the attempt to work through the problems that arose, mainly through creative output. Each generation has its own system of creating power and opportunity, serving to drive each successive generation further. However, it is important to note that this progression has not followed a straight trajectory. Rather, it has shifted and meandered through alternate routes and back roads. These paths have been devoutly followed by some, though the unpredictable detours or forks in the road have rendered this an exhausting and seemingly futile endeavor. Those

who persevere, however, refuse to let obstacles stand in their way “post-moment.” It is thus to the second category of beings that I turned to for insight into this progression, attempting to further the growth and evolution of awareness, understanding, creative production, and the shrinking of exclusionary spaces.

*THE SPACE-CREATION CONTINUUM // EX NIHILO NIHIL FIT*

Using the “moment” for fuel and inspiration, many have plunged headlong into the effort to transform exclusionary spaces. Through language, emotion, passion, and perseverance, these predecessors laid the foundation for the reformation of the world’s conception of the ordinary distribution of space, as well as of themselves. To begin to understand even a fraction of the trajectory of this immense reorganizational effort that spanned millennia, and is by no means near completion, a chronological framework of who contributed what is in order. This exploration through history is not just that; it does not intend or claim to examine all of human history in an exhaustive laundry list to make connections from there. It may follow a chronological framework, though just as progress cannot move forward in only one direction, neither could this investigation.

Before discussing those minds who have been tied into the discussion in previous chapters, I want to turn back even further in history, past the French Renaissance of Étienne de la Boétie, all the way to ancient Rome. In one of the first metaphysical and cosmological exploratory texts of its kind, *On the Nature of the Universe* by Lucretius delves deeply into atomic particle theory as an alternative explanation for the intricacies of nature and the world. This alternate was offered in place of the widespread belief in divine intervention and creation, something that Lucretius adamantly denounced. In the

first book of the text, he enters into a meditation on the first principle of nature, that of the impossibility of sporadic creation from nothing. One more step back must be taken in order to understand this principle, to the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BCE. This principle, the first argument for which was given by Parmenides, an ancient Greek philosopher, is implicated by Lucretius to illustrate the imponderability of the universe having been constructed by the gods.<sup>15</sup> I am implementing it, however, to attempt to illuminate how some theories have provided the raw material for those that followed, as well as to demonstrate the impossibility of unprompted or unprecedented creation. The creation that follows may be unrecognizable from its predecessor, having taken a different path. However, the essence of what came before will remain, if only a drop.

Suggesting that this principle could be understood through observation, Lucretius writes,

That nothing ever by divine power comes from nothing.  
 For sure fear holds so much the minds of men  
 Because they see many things happen in earth and sky  
 Of which they can by no means see the causes,  
 And think them to be done by power divine.  
 So when we have seen that nothing can be created  
 From nothing, we shall at once discern more clearly  
 The object of our search. (1.149-156)

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<sup>15</sup> Palmer, John. "Parmenides." Edited by Edward N. Zalta. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 8 Feb. 2008,

<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/parmenides/>>.

This principle is significant twofold. Aside from its place in the disavowal of complete divine creation, the principle stands to demonstrate that creation can only be possible from what already exists.

The existing atoms cannot be destroyed, nor can new ones be created. Rather, they reform and reshape as they combine in different patterns, each arrangement resulting in different beings and objects. In what could be best described as a random occurrence, the combination of atoms may produce the simplest result, like a plankton or a rock. In just as indiscriminate an instance it can create a sentient being with complex internal systems and metaphysical qualities. The material is always there; it is just how one decides to approach it or use it that results in either the maintenance of a stasis or the launching of oneself into more intricate situations and understandings. These beings, created from infinite particles, will eventually break down as nothing can escape mortality, their materials recycled back into the earth and ether. These newly released atoms will then recirculate throughout the atmosphere until they collide with each other and begin the process over again. I believe the same is true with knowledge, theory, and understanding. Without the existence of particles and theories, the groundwork for which having been laid out by those who came before, the creation of profound and instrumental works would not be possible. Something had to have come before, in some form or another, to make what comes next a possible reality.

#### *MAKING SOMETHING FROM NOTHING*

After giving this notion the historical exploration and attention it deserved, the discussion can now return to those whose work has been examined in earlier chapters.



Chronologically, first is de la Boétie writing in 16<sup>th</sup> century France. Though this jump is temporal, it is logical as well, for it builds upon the foundation provided by the progenitors of creation. It could be inferred that de la Boétie was familiar with the works of ancient philosophers such as Parmenides and Lucretius, as his close friend and fellow intellectual, Michel de Montaigne, directly quotes *On the Nature of the Universe* in *Les Essais*, where he is pondering life, love, friendship, creation, and mortality, following de la Boétie's death.<sup>16</sup> Being aware of particle theory having observable qualities, if one just looked closely enough in the right place, de la Boétie recognized that perhaps the most productive way to address a specific issue in the realm of sentient beings was through observation and consequent theorization. Thus, the concept of "voluntary servitude" and the power of a tyrant being fueled solely by those who voluntarily submit, is one that came out of building upon what is observed and learned.

De la Boétie, unable to rest comfortably in a world of submission-sustained tyrants, created this concept in response to what he observed around him. From the absence of a tangible, productive, or organized repudiation against the submission he observed came a theory that could push this effort further than one coming from nothing (if this were possible) would be able to. He scoured possible reasons for a voluntary submission and argued for ways to combat this phenomenon. Desiring a world in which beings do not submit without at least questioning or retaliating, de la Boétie sought to highlight *what* to avoid in order to illuminate *how* to avoid it. Although de la Boétie was definitely not arguing for the prevention of submission on the part of women, people of

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<sup>16</sup> Schachter, Marc D. *Voluntary Servitude and the Erotics of Friendship from Classical Antiquity to Early Modern France*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016.

color, or those who belonged to lower classes, these initial observations provided a framework for understanding why a being would submit if not explicitly told or forced to. As a result of this construction of understanding, new frameworks were made possible that did include all beings in their intended liberatory effect.

Next, over three hundred years after de la Boétie, we come to Du Bois writing in America at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Having been born post-abolition, Du Bois was born knowing some degree of the freedom de la Boétie speaks of as a necessary component to overcoming “voluntary servitude,” though it was limited and complicated by the overtly racist and cruel political system and the continued denial of basic human rights for African Americans. This semblance of freedom was shattered as Du Bois experienced double-consciousness for the first time. In that “moment,” Du Bois became an ideal candidate for voluntary submission as it was detailed by de la Boétie. Through an awareness of and education from history, however, Du Bois was able to explore this painful division of the self through the creation of some of the most profound works of literature of the era. In refusing to submit, valuing his freedom, and maintaining a strong sense of self, Du Bois strove to understand the self and its relation to history. As a result of this refusal and consequent introspection, Du Bois continued to challenge exclusionary spaces and went on to be the first African American to earn a doctorate from Harvard, among many other accomplishments.

From Du Bois’ life work and the contributions to the world previously mentioned, several essential points can be extracted and implemented in the creation of my theory of productivity “post-moment.” The first is the importance of recognizing the split self and making peace with it, to an extent. From this split state of existence a new, expanded

vision of the self and the surrounding world is made available. If it is recognized, aired out, and its existence accepted, however, this split-state can be utilized in the drive to creative production. A recognition of this division does not entail a conscious acknowledgement. Rather, this production of creative output is a physical or representational manifestation of the malaise associated with the “moment.”

The next jump is not as large in terms of time lapsed but the creative results spoke to an entirely different class, race, and gender from those of Du Bois. Virginia Woolf, writing in England in the 1920's until her suicide in the early 1940's, takes up the fight of equal rights in the name of women. Hailing from a well-to-do family based in an affluent district of London, Woolf's driving message in *A Room of One's Own* is the importance of attaining and retaining a designated space and the necessary resources for creative output. As a result of her status and position, Woolf's stance on the necessary provisions to enter the exclusive space of writing were quite far from the self awareness and introspection of Du Bois and de la Boétie, as she argued that the sum of “five hundred pounds a year will keep one alive in the sunshine” (Woolf, *A Room*,39). Following the death of her Aunt Mary, Woolf received these “five hundred pounds a year for ever” (Woolf, *A Room*,37). That is almost \$30,000 today. While this may not seem to be such a large sum, it is important to keep in mind that this was supplementary to her husband's income as well as previous inheritances.

Having experienced her own version of double consciousness as a woman, Woolf is arguing that women have been left out of the arena of creative production because they were not afforded the proper space or resources (literal and figurative) to explore their multiplicitous selves in. Woolf, regarding this space and its lack of privacy posited, “If a

woman wrote, she would have to write in the common sitting-room...subject to all kinds of casual interruptions” (Woolf, *A Room*,66-67). Women could write letters “by the fire whilst the men talked without disturbing them” but were forced to hide any other creative writing (Woolf, *A Room*,62). There was plenty of space, but it was privileged for men and only occupiable by women if they caused no disruptions (despite being constantly subjected to them). If this argument is expanded to the inclusion of all beings in the realm of opportunity, then Woolf’s notions do not differ so much from those of Du Bois or de la Boétie, as they all are striving for a world that is less ignorant and dismissive of the intricacies of subjectivity and creativity.

Progress is subjective and along with each “advancement” comes a new set of associated problems. Growing out of this concept, Annie Ernaux completed *A Frozen Woman* in 1981 and rescripted what she saw to be the necessary components of a productive, fulfilling, and conscious life. As Ernaux tracked the gradual devolution of self and life through the lens of her narrator, it became clear that a new approach to living this desired life was necessary. All that previously brought her joy (an education, the prospect of a career, freedom) now led to an inescapable sense of loss and frustration. As a result of the intensity with which she felt and sought out her desires, the joy she previously felt had become an integral aspect of her being. As she moved further away from these dreams, she made her best attempt to find joy in her new tasks; those of motherhood and keeping house. Despite her best efforts, however, the feeling that something was amiss grew increasingly present and persistent. She had lost the space necessary for production. The loss of literal space came about as she was relegated to the

kitchen table to study, in order to keep an eye on dinner and the baby. In the figurative sense, however, the loss of space was felt much more intensely.

Slowly, after the birth of their first child, her husband's demeanor shifted from that of an intellectual equal, friend, and lover to the domineering provider and demanding spouse; the prophecy of her in-laws was coming true. It became less important (in his eyes) for Ernaux to continue her education and pursue a career as a teacher. As a result of his unrelenting belittlement as well as accumulating societal pressures, she began to internalize these notions, driving them closer to "eternalization" with each repetition. However, bodily memory rendered her unable to completely sacrifice her passions; those things that brought her joy pre-marriage and pre-baby had become so intertwined with her nature, almost akin to a first language, that she was unable to extract them entirely from her being. As she learned the second language of maternity and being a dutiful wife, Ernaux struggled to reconcile the discrepancies felt between the first language of freedom and joy, experienced through learning, growing, and exploring new spaces, and the second of confinement and discontent.

With the realization that there was an increasingly large gap between the formerly indistinguishable senses of self, Ernaux wrestled with these newly identified incongruences. Interpreting the situation was difficult without the ability to channel it through creative production, further contributing to the cyclical problem. This "moment" of clarity provided the necessary momentum to begin to reconceptualize her self and her place in the world. As a result of this reconceptualization, analyzed through and aided by her narrator, Ernaux eventually divorced her husband and has had a very successful career as a teacher and author.

### *PHENOMENOLOGICAL SHIFTS*

With a continually expanding awareness, progress can advance in tandem. While creative output increased in some fields, along paths that were popular for social exploration, other routes had yet to be explored. As a result, the necessity to delve deeper into the causes of the “moment” and a painful discord of self, specifically in regards to aspects previously unexplored, prevailed and intensified. As a result of this lingering *sine qua non*, there has been a progression within each of the factions explored in this text, as well as an increased survey of and investigation into exclusive or uncharted realms of being. One of these uncharted fields involved the intricacies of masculinit(ies)y. There are few prominent examples of early introspective work on masculinity and the “wider circumference” of its impact. Pierre Bourdieu and Michael Messner, two notable sociologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, each explored this concept in distinct ways, though I believe they had similar goals in mind. Though both produced a large body of work, I decided to explore one specific example of insight and theory from each.

After decades of sociological work in which he began to explore the dominant and submissive relationship through the lens of “eternalized” conceptions of honor, virility, valor, and presentation, Bourdieu published *Masculine Domination* in 1998. Designating the exclusive space devoted to men as the “male space,” Bourdieu provided the language and framework for identifying the potential source or fuel for this closed off space. Through the repetitive use of certain language and the implementation of ideals, these notions of masculinity have been seemingly rendered immutable, a phenomenon that Bourdieu termed “eternalization.” As a result of this perceived solidity, the reactions

to the notions “eternalized” by this repetition on the part of men, though painful, had not been explicitly challenged or explored. New multifaceted consciousness arising out of the progression of awareness, however, allowed for the exploration of concepts such as the effects of a singular notion of masculinity.

Messner continues this exploration and conversation seemingly right where Bourdieu left off, eight years later in his piece, *On Patriarchs and Losers: Rethinking Men's Interests*. The male space of Bourdieu's theory was expanded by Messner as he entered into the concept and discussion of masculinity as multiple. Aware of the popular notion within some factions of feminism of all masculinity being toxic, he pushed back against this to explain and demonstrate different forms of masculinity; how hegemonic masculinity (the dominant variation of masculinity) wins more often than not and how harmful it can be to place all men under the same heading of pernicious masculinity. Further, Messner finds a link between hegemonic masculinity and the phenomenon of what he termed “emphasized femininity;” another historically “eternalized” response to the submission expected by women, along similar lines to Bourdieu's conception of the same spectacle.<sup>17</sup>

As the space previously unavailable to women and other subordinated groups was increasingly reclaimed, Messner suggests that the negative response by men to this effort was fueled by the belief that it was felt as a loss of space for themselves. As these theories were expanded upon, a clear evolution began to take shape. There was a shift away from the explicit demonization of men for the harmful forms of masculinity. This

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<sup>17</sup> Recognizing femininity as an exaggerated response to the submission demanded by vulgar displays of masculinity, Bourdieu's argument did not chastise or blame women who have voluntarily submitted, as de la Boétie described the process, for these acts; rather they were the result of historically “eternalized” notions of expected behavior.

act proved fruitful for all beings for it reciprocally validated and removed the seemingly “eternalized” necessity for the fear based response to hegemonic masculinity that has been performed by women throughout history. This was a shift that I felt in myself as well.

Previously claiming membership to the sect of feminism that vilified all men and placed them under the umbrella of hegemonic masculinity, I tried to use this line of thinking to expand my theory of how women could push back against subordination. However, after encountering thinkers such as Bourdieu and Messner, I noticed an evolution of thought towards a much more understanding, inclusive, and ultimately rewarding framework. One of the most important things that I have had my eyes opened to, if not the most important, is that everyone experiences some form of the “moment” in their own subjective way. No one is safe from the associated pain and dissociated self. This realization helped me shift from the camp of martyrdom and overarching blame to one seeking a path to utilize this “moment” for creative output, something that I am implementing in these very words. It is with these themes and garnered notions in mind that the discussion nears its (temporary) end in the context of this piece.





### **Present Tensions: An Unresolved Dissonance**

Maintaining the collection of expansive notions of personhood and a sense of growing awareness, the framework developed in this paper is derived largely from the shift I experienced during its production. This was observable and palpable in conversation and all interactions, as well as the directive and intention of my writing. The most important result of this shift, however, is only tangible to me, so I will try to explain it as thoroughly as possible. As a result of my shift in thinking and mode of viewing the world, a “moment” in itself, I was able to interpret some texts in a different way than when I was still confined to the unproductive and divisive realm of men vs. women. Two examples of this stand out. The first, chronologically, is *King Kong Theory*. In her novel, Desportes explores the intricacies of her early life, her experiences as a sex worker, and what life was like in the wake of her controversial novel turned film, *Baise-Moi*. “Pre-moment” me digested this text and its blunt, unapologetic language as properly angry and antagonistic. I was thrilled to find someone who was able to put into words all that I had been feeling towards men. It is only “post-moment” that I was able to realize that these garnered conceptions were problematic and misguided.

Recognizing the painful associations of masculinities served to reorient my understanding of Desportes’ message. When she muses, “okay, so today’s world is a long way from the Promised land for all of us. Neither women nor men are happy here. And this has nothing to do with the respect of gender traditions,” I almost took offense (17). How could men not be happy? Everything seems to be designed in their favor! Further, she posits that “[t]raditional masculinity is just as crippling a venture as the summons to

femininity...being a success, so he can seduce the best women. Fearing his homosexuality, since real men must never be penetrated” (26). The first time I read this statement, I was sure she was being entirely facetious, and I liked that. Where I had been placing Despentes’ views under one restrictive category, I was in fact doing a disservice to the meaning behind her words. Despentes was entering the exclusive space of writing in a voice previously deemed un-ladylike. Refusing to rein in her expressiveness, she put forth her beliefs in an unyielding, impenitent, and entirely original language. This new dialect successfully paralyzed me; I was unable, at first, to look for the fullest meaning behind these candid and sometimes unsettling descriptions. After the discovery of Messner and Bourdieu, among others, Despentes’ words took on a whole new meaning. She was not being flippant, but rather truly believes that men are just as damaged by masculinity as women are. This evolution was a milestone in the development of my own theory; almost at once, my viewpoint was thrown wide open and the framework I had begun to create was quickly dismantled.

The second text, the interpretation of which was directly shifted by the evolution of my thought, is *The Ethics of Care as a Politics of the Ordinary*. With a central theme of inclusion, understanding, and empowerment, this piece sought to reorient the language of care and ethics towards the ordinary. Implementing Ordinary Language Philosophy, Laugier is encouraging the empowerment of the underrepresented expression of women and other silenced voices, arguing that the ordinary has been overlooked and undervalued precisely for its association to women and the domestic. She argues that in order to uncover a voice for the voiceless, a redirection of attention is necessary: “Attention to human voices and to ordinary life creates a paradigm shift in ethics that is deeply

connected with attention to, and repossession of, ordinary language” (228). This attention towards social matters and to disregarded realities is instrumental in the attainment of being able to express oneself, and it is facilitated through a framework of importance, “more precisely ‘the importance of importance’” (227).

My first reading of Laugier’s piece resulted in a devaluing of the unordinary. Recognizing the necessity of an ethics framed around those who fall under the category of ordinary, I was doing a disservice to both Laugier’s argument as well as those who had always had a say in the matter, though perhaps did not have control of the speech emanating from this voice. Further, Laugier posits that “The (polemical) importance of the ethics of care is that, like OLP, it subverts well-established intellectual and social hierarchies and attracts attention to a number of phenomena that are overlooked” (227). This framework stood out to me as the best carrier for my initial intended conceptualizations. The subversion of these “well-established” systems, what I would assert are akin to “eternalized” social constructs, is a vital part of endowing with agency those who are attempting to enter closed spaces in an effort to work through the associated difficulties of the “moment.” This was all well and good, until I began to completely overlook the intricacies of these “social hierarchies” and their associated members.

Still believing that men were the root of all evil, I took this to mean that removing the significance of men within these structures was the most productive path to reorienting this importance towards the underexplored. However, this concept of the underexplored was expanded with the reading of Bourdieu and Messner, among others. I began to realize that the concept of the ordinary could contain any being; the only criteria

for membership being an existence that was denied or devalued, whether just aspects of the whole, or the existence in its entirety. This meant that not only were women and other marginalized groups belonging to the ordinary, those in need of this reorientation, but so were men. The complexities of masculinity had been unknown to me; thus I had internalized the idea that they could never be associated with this ordinary. Laugier tells us that no one is endowed with “one’s own voice” as a part of their nature, rather, “it must be *found* so as to speak in the name of others and to let others speak in one’s name” (231, emphasis in original). Speaking in the name of others is a powerful and dangerous task. If not done properly and thoughtfully, it results in the alienation, undervaluing, or dismissal of the ordinary.

#### *A STEP BACK*

After examining the specific progressions through history I have chosen to explore and implicate, the discussion now arrives at the present. The representations and interpretations of a growing self awareness, as well as a general mindfulness, have continued to grow and evolve, albeit in a scattered trajectory. Owing largely to what came before, the creation of new frameworks for processing the “moment” and turning it into creative output has become increasingly more possible and more productive. This production has also grown its notions of creative expression, with a larger awareness allowing for a wider range of accepted or encouraged modes of manifestation and meditation. Creation does not necessarily mean artistic, visual, or physical creation; rather it encompasses the act of releasing tensions and pains to produce something, whether that something is tangible or conceptual is not important. What is of importance,

however, is that this creation is helpful and powerful, for it stands to reassert ones' place in the world through the act of entering exclusionary spaces where this creation may have previously been barred or undervalued.

In order to initiate the desired creation, it becomes necessary to extricate from a split existence the issues one wishes to address through this framework. Previously, the "moment" was the primary fuel for creative expression but without a proper framework for working through the associated pain, side effects weighed heavily on those trying to reconfigure an understanding of themselves and make sense of the world around them. From this discord with the self arose a vast collection of creative output that chronicled the moment as well as theorized on its wider impact. These meditations ranged in subject matter and varied in mediums, but all were born from this very state of a split existence derived from, caused by, and existing as a result of the "moment." Where previously excellence (as far as it could be attained in the allotted space) was the ultimate achievement, forcing all other accomplishments into the background or out of the picture all together, these expressions of pain through creativity have aided in the reorientation of goals and the language used to describe even the most mundane symptoms of the "moment."

### *WHO'S AFRAID OF THE PAST?*

There may arise a crippling sensation of fear of the mundane, of reaching a point in life where, upon reflection, it seems as though much more could have been accomplished, and at a higher degree at that. These ongoing reflections are small instances of double consciousness in themselves; suddenly something sparks this thought

where it formerly had lain dormant. While the life lived until this moment may have been one of contentment in some form of bliss, in an instant this view can shift to the other end of the spectrum. Everything done until this moment has not brought you to the desired place. Much like Ernaux's experience chronicled in *A Frozen Woman*, these shifts can be rapid and dizzying. One moment she is denouncing marriage, a moment later, she is married and thinks it cannot be all that bad, until the next when she realizes she is unhappy as everything that previously brought immense joy has been extracted from her daily life. While every occurrence of this phenomenon is not as drastic or distinctive as that description, the heart of the issue lies in the ability for a mindset to shift in the blink of an eye. This differs from the double consciousness of the "moment" in that this kind can be enacted upon the self. The comparison can be made between the self and the perceived or desired self, but only you can make the distinction. Thus, the presence of another is not wholly necessary for this shift to occur as is the case with the "moment."

As a direct result of the language that has been used so frequently to describe a being's place in the world, these notions have become deeply lodged in the structure of society, as well as in the minds of individual members of this population. When a body of people are repetitively conditioned to understand their place as outside of others or of less importance, these notions become seemingly inextricable from one another and thus reciprocally, negatively affect the individual (and the population as a whole) for opportunities are either not presented or are not sought out as a result. When these opportunities are never open, the effort needed to open them by (light) force is exponential. It becomes crucial to conserve this effort, however, as we have less to offer each time we begin something new.

In order to escape the seemingly eternal cycle of these disarming moments as well as to overcome the strife caused by the “moment,” it becomes important to reflectively and reflexively look inside the self to the places that are most viscerally affected. This is also intricately woven into the fabric of (re)gaining space; an in depth survey and understanding of the self will be a fruitful step along the way to achieving and creating power. What must come first, following the increased awareness of that which is causing strife, is the internalization of history and all that it can teach. As Bourdieu suggested, what must happen first is a redirection of the study of history in an effort to break the cycle of “eternalization” of the past being overlooked. After this happens, the language implemented in these discussions of historical events, now possessing merit and importance, can be surveyed and critiqued. This is an important step for without this analysis, the language will continue to be utilized in the same way, thus cyclically reinforcing the negative affects of certain concepts or events. Further, this is important because it is essentially enacting double consciousness on the world and historical events, tearing the former view from the new, holistic view of the past as it will affect the present and future.

### *THE CYCLE OF EXCLUSION*

If the cycle of “eternalized” dominance and submission is to be permanently discontinued or chipped away at, this exclusionary space must be redistributed or retaken by those to whom the space was not previously extended. As discussed in chapter one, this reclamation or redistribution of space is necessarily experienced as a major transgression to those to whom the space was never closed off as there is only so much



literal and figurative space to be occupied or visited. That being said, the act of reclamation should not be one that induces guilt or shame. That it is felt as an encroachment and affront by others does not necessitate that it is experienced by those reconceptualizing as such; it is space that was not made to be laid claim to from the outset. It began as the figurative space of creation, culture, and life; the public sphere. However, before it could be explored by all, it was colonized by the dominant men in a hegemonic system that both encouraged and confused the expression of masculinity and the self. Therefore, the space was corrupted before its entirety could be investigated. As this practice of dominance ensuring access to this space was repeated, it became “eternalized” as a staple of society. As a result of this, each excluded member of society who attempted to enter this space was met with a rude awakening to the world’s view of the self.

*FOREVER INDEBTED TO HER CAUSE*<sup>18</sup>

The present is indebted to the past, while still remaining critical of the unproductive or problematic views and frameworks that came before. Building, evolving, and creating, the beings of today have exceeded the projections or desires of predecessors, in some realms. Where Woolf had to make the case for women gaining access to the male dominated and exclusive sphere of writing, today one would be hard pressed to find a profession that is not held by women. With all of the progress and reclamations of space, there are fifty-eight countries, as of 2016, that have elected a

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<sup>18</sup> "When a Woman Loves." Lyrics by Robert S. Kelly. *Love Letters*, Universal Music Publishing Group, 2009.

female leader.<sup>19</sup> The United States is not one of them. Progress does not necessarily mean completion. Further, some of these female heads of state were only brought to power as a result of their familial relations to previous male leaders based upon the assumption that they had inherited their flair for ruling, troubling the notion of a female leader for the reasoning behind her election becomes murky. As it becomes unknowable whether she was brought to power based upon merit or kin, speculation around her capability increases. Thus, even within some of the more “progressive” realms, there is still room for exploration, reorientation, reconfiguration, and reconceptualization.

So then, where are we? With the output of various mediums of expression, this growing consciousness has taken the form of film, television, written arts, studio arts, music, curation, critique, theory, and linguistic analysis, to name a few. The sheer mass of progress and creative output that may have been, had everyone been given the proper resources to explore and create, is inconceivable. Although women now have the right to enter professions and spaces previously closed to them, such as higher education and the right to vote in the United States, almost two-thirds of the population of 758 million illiterate adults in the world are women. That is over 500 million women, as of 2014, who cannot read or write.<sup>20</sup> Access to education is fundamental and crucial to the implementation of the framework created here. This does not mean creation is not

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<sup>19</sup> Wills, Amanda, et al. “All the Countries That Had a Woman Leader before the U.S.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 9 June 2016, [www.cnn.com/interactive/2016/06/politics/women-world-leaders/](http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2016/06/politics/women-world-leaders/).

<sup>20</sup> “Literacy.” *The World Factbook*. Central Intelligence Agency, 2015, [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2103.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2103.html)

possible, or that exclusionary spaces cannot be penetrated without a traditional education, just that the methods for doing so vary from those implicated in this paper.

What is needed now is a further revision and compilation of past frameworks with attention to their problematic, harmful, and exclusionary aspects. This revision can be implemented to aid in emerging from the “moment” to produce creative output. As another generation makes way for their successors, the subjective discovery of what it means to be a thoughtful, conscious, compassionate, creative, and understanding being in the midst of the chaos of the world becomes possible through increased introspection and a greater self-consciousness. We cannot alter or revise history, but we can work towards a better future. If this text and its associated concepts were to be revised again in 2056, I would hope that it is in a more progressive and supportive moment. As television anchor Frank Reynolds so hauntingly expressed in 1979, regarding the last solar eclipse that would be visible to North America in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, until August of last year, “That’s thirty-eight years from now. May the shadow of the moon fall on a world at peace.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "1979 Solar Eclipse- ABC News Coverage." *YouTube*, uploaded by Steve Newman, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAacZoIJUN0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAacZoIJUN0).

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